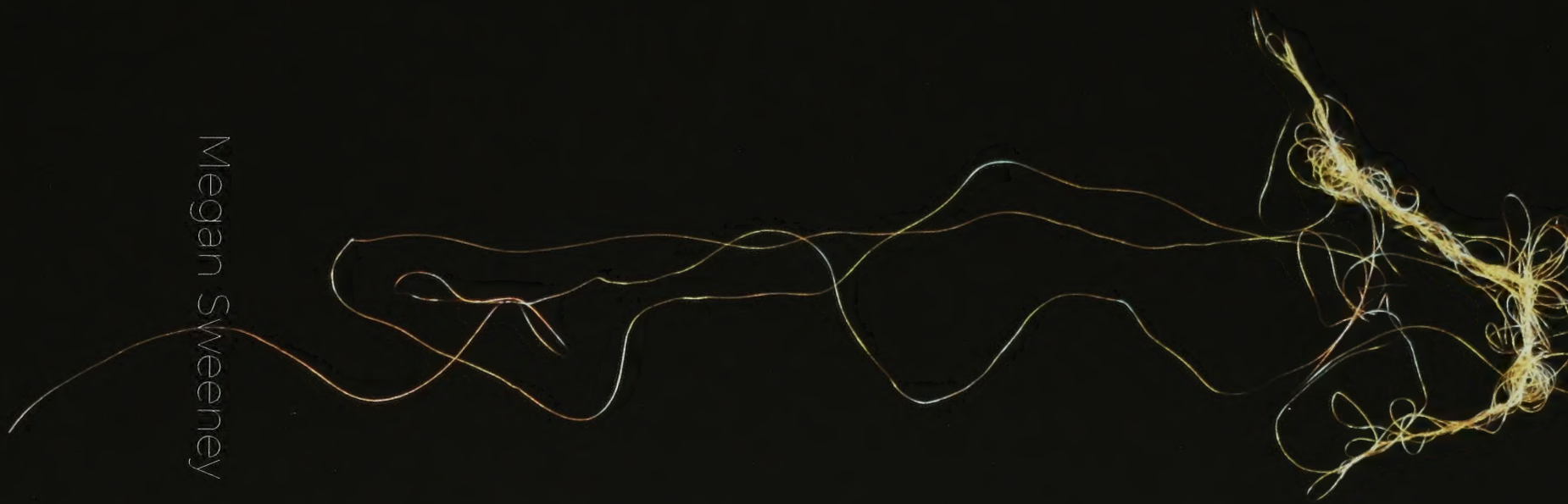
Mendings



Megan Sweeney

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Mendings

Shoulder
L'epaule
Hombro
CUTTING LINE
Ligne de coupe
Linea del corte
SEAM LINE
La couture
Linea de costura
22
Front Facing
Parementure du devant
Vista del delantero
17
1316—Size 12
19 Pieces
PLACE ON LENGTHWISE GRAIN OF FABRIC
Placez dans le sens de la longueur du tissu
Colocar a lo largo del hilo de tela

Me

ndings

Megan Sweeney

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Cover art: *Unfurling*, 2018. Gold thread on black velvet.
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An earlier version of "Selvedge" appeared in a much different form in *Entropy Magazine* (September 2018).

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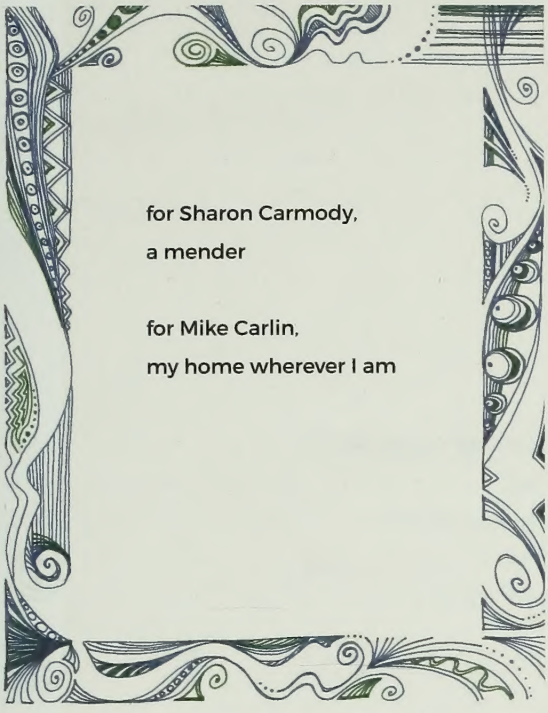

for Sharon Carmody,
a mender

for Mike Carlin,
my home wherever I am

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.
—Leonard Cohen, "Anthem" (1992)

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A Note on Ornaments

My niece Sophie Bauerschmidt Sweeney drew the buttons and ornaments that adorn these pages. Each button represents an actual button from my button box, and each line drawing was inspired by Sophie's reading of *Mendings*.

Piecing: A Prologue

There is a time in life when you expect the world to be always full of new things. And then comes a day when you realise that is not how it will be at all. You see that life will become a thing made of holes. Absences. Losses. Things that were there and are no longer. And you realise, too, that you have to grow around and between the gaps, though you can put your hand out to where things were and feel that tense, shining dullness of the space where the memories are. —Helen Macdonald, *H Is for Hawk* (2014)

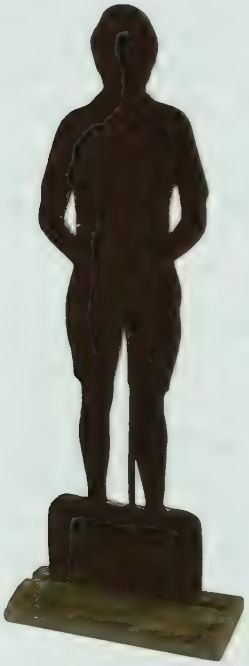
"Piecing" as "peacing": pieces that make peace between the living and the dead. —Peter Stallybrass, "Worn Worlds" (2012)

I'm sitting on the floor, using old plastic bags, scratch paper, and paper towels to wrap some figurines and vases that I want to donate to a thrift store. It's Memorial Day weekend, and my siblings and I are clearing out our family lake house in southwestern New York now that both of our parents are dead. One of my sisters repeatedly zooms past me with a wheelbarrow. Each time, she loads the wheelbarrow with everything in her line of sight and empties it into the thirty-foot dumpster in the driveway.

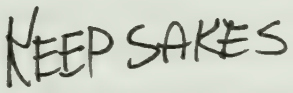
"Thank you for your service," another sister says to each item as she carries it to the dumpster. She learned this mantra from her professional decluttering coach but repeats it in jest since she is having little trouble parting with things. I join in the joke, thanking useless and garish

objects, such as a knee-high white bear statue that served as an ashtray, then plant stand, then junk collector. But as a saver born with a "pre-sentiment of loss," I find myself whispering the mantra seriously several times as I add to our mountain of trash.[1]

I don't hesitate, however, to discard the engraved clocks, paperweights, and sculptures that commemorate my dad's philanthropy; all those wood, metal, and glass objects fuel my fear that my dad viewed his wealth—not his children—as his progeny. Also destined for the dumpster are the eight-inch cardboard cutouts of my dad, photographs that have stood watch over the bookshelves for decades. I keep just one of these statues, its features so faded that only my dad's outline is recognizable.



We don't talk about it, but all of us seem to welcome this purging process. The lake house feels haunted with loss, having witnessed our deepest conflicts, diminished gatherings, and parents' deaths. For me, its state of disrepair evokes my mother and father, whose increasingly self-destructive tendencies came to fruition under its sagging roof. Yet, while some of my siblings seem eager to haul out the detritus and bolt the door for good, I don't work that way. I need time to listen for the stories that objects tell, to dwell with my memories, to contemplate the pain next to equally powerful experiences of joy and bone-deep belonging.



When we discover the Bud Light boxes with the word *Keepsakes* scrawled in my mother's handwriting, my siblings are ready to toss them into the dumpster. Just in the nick of time, I rescue the moldy, mouse-nibbled boxes and lock them in my car.

I didn't set out to write *Mendings*. My initial plan was to write about harm and redress in twentieth- and twenty-first-century African American, Native American, and South African literary texts. My attention shifted, though, to a more immediate story of repair: soldiers' efforts to reckon with their war-related experiences through writing and art-making. When I discovered Combat Paper, a project that involves veterans transforming military uniforms into handmade paper, I was riveted by the connection between texts and textiles and by possibilities for weaving together storytelling, making, and individual and collective efforts to reckon with violence and grief.

But in casting about for the specific focus of my project, I found myself captivated by my own sewing projects. After attending a weeklong "sewing camp" that involved refashioning clothes with prior histories, I set up a sewing room with a cutting table, a rack of thread spools arranged by color, bins for in-progress projects, and a wooden box of carefully categorized buttons. "I should be working on my scholarship," I'd think while cutting out patterns, mending and repurposing vintage garments, or hand-beading a dress.

Around this time, I also discovered a range of women artists who engage in various practices of mending and unraveling. Fascinated by the central role that women have played in the daily, domestic, affective labor of mending, and eager to understand how these artists think about their work, I asked several if they'd be willing to talk. I interviewed Celia Pym about her practice of visible mending, Nina Katchadourian about her *Mended Spiderweb* series, and Brooks Harris Stevens about her practice of using gold thread to "repair" buildings, landscapes, and worn textiles. I talked with Elana Herzog, who unravels carpets and bedspreads, and Sonya Clark, who hosts collective unravelings of the Confederate flag. Paula Stebbins Becker told me about the tapestries she creates from unraveled and rewoven fibers, and mg shapiro shared with me an array of stunning artworks created from adhesive bandages and surgical tape. I was enthralled by these artists. Curiously, however, I had little to say about their gorgeous work. Circling and circling, I finally realized that what captivated me was each artist's process and the ways in which her material practices of mending led me to think about aspects of my own experiences. My sewing was both handiwork and intellectual labor, preparation for the next round of mending that I needed to do with my parents and myself. Slowly, wary of self-indulgence and my inexperience with narrative writing, I began to piece together the fragments that have coalesced into this book.

The trunk and back seat of my car are already filled to capacity. I arrived at the house two days before my less sentimental family members, and alongside one of my sisters and her daughter, I've been squirreling away my spoils: my mom's sketchbook; the collages of family photos I made for my dad and the quilt I made for his seventieth birthday, with swatches of clothing from every member of my family; sterling silverware that belonged to my mother's aunt; a hideous pig statue (one of the ugliest of my family's collection of hideous pigs); and our balding Christmas angel with nicotine-stained wings.

Inside the Keepsakes boxes, I discover a multigenerational paper trail. Sixty years' worth of programs from First Communions, confirmations, commencements, Red Masses, weddings, and funerals. Photos of grandchildren, Chinese executives, school chums, and my nineteen-year-old mother learning how to fish. A newspaper announcement of my maternal grandmother's 1924 piano recital and a program from my mother and aunt's 1948 piano recital. Certificates of achievement for horseback riding, cheerleading, swimming, tennis, cessation of smoking, and completion of a course on "Contemporary Moral Problems." The notice of the eighth-grade garage sale and the funeral booklet for my maternal grandmother, who died at age thirty-seven. The report cards, standardized tests, schoolwork, and artwork of six children and four foster children. Every letter and postcard that my siblings and I sent from summer camp and subsequent travels. My mom's kindergarten progress report and the newspaper clipping about my maternal uncle, who drowned at age thirty-nine while rescuing two of his children. Christmas lists from 1995 and my sister's eighth-grade term paper on alcoholism, titled "Like Father, Like Son." Envelopes filled with half-century-old locks of children's once-vibrant red hair. The annual reports from my dad's firm and the family portrait that I drew at age five, which includes a naked, anatomically correct picture of my abusive foster brother with both his name and the word STREEKER written in capital letters.

I pore over the evidence for hours at a time, wondering how my siblings could throw away the Keepsakes and why my mother would have saved them with no apparent attempts to sort or grapple with their disparate contents. When I was in my early twenties, my mischievous roommates would put fabric scraps in our kitchen trash can just to see if I'd retrieve them; I invariably did, firm in my belief that meaning, possibility, and beauty inhere in all-too-easily-discarded bits and pieces.

> The music of the woolgatherers performing their task. Bending, extending, shaking out the air. Gathering what needs to be gathered. The discarded. The adored. Bits of human spirit that somehow got away. Caught up in an apron. Plucked by a gloved hand. —PATTI SMITH, *Woolgathering* (1992)

Mending—efforts to repair what's torn, to create something like a whole from fragments—has been my work for decades: as a social worker, as a seamstress in a king-size men's clothing factory, as a quilter in an African American cultural arts center in rural Mississippi, as a teacher in bilingual elementary schools on the border of Mexico and in New York City, and as a researcher in women's prisons, where consummate menders create meaning from the frayed edges and remnants of their experiences. And now, the task I face as a daughter is to assemble something like a whole from the stories summoned by the Keepsakes: stories of fierce love, of beseeching and bereavement, of impassioned, imperfect efforts to piece together meaningful lives.

These days, amid centuries-old struggles for racial justice, global-scale loss from COVID-19, and mounting evidence of irreparable environmental devastation, the whole world seems to be grieving, searching for ways to attend to disavowed histories, to salvage what may still be of use, to participate in meaningful forms of mending.

As participants in Combat Paper well know, cloth and clothing offer an embodied archive for exploring mending. Cloth "endures, but it is mortal," writes Peter Stallybrass, reminding us that textiles are alive, saturated with the smells, sweat, and epidermal residues of their makers and users, shaped by the "memory" embedded in the elbow or knee of a garment, in patterns of wear or fading.[2] Imbued with histories and identities, with kinship ties and social relations, clothing and cloth preserve both wanted and unwanted stories, enabling us to gather what needs to be gathered, to retrieve—and to hold—the bits of human spirit that somehow got away.

As records of daily life, clothes foster understanding of both intimate personal experiences and broader histories and social systems. Clothing is a tool for internal reckoning and for external engagement. It signals individuality and social legibility. It's a necessity and a privilege, protective and decorative, utilitarian and the stuff of consuming passion. Clothes enable entangling and disentangling, manage anxieties and create them, serve as armor and sometimes as sword. They hide and render visible. They preserve and defy conventions. They reconcile and ramify our various selves. Clothing is a domain of the deadly serious and a domain of the lighthearted. It's a site of oppression and liberation, of forced labor and free expression, of violence and healing. It's consumption and creativity, a tourist trap and an entry point for genuine cross-cultural engagement. It's a means to live in the present and a repository of the past. Clothing is an environmental disaster and a resource for surviving—through meaning-making, merry-making, and community building—as the world burns around us.

Mendings tells an intimate story about family, selfhood, and the love and loss lodged in garments. The essays address my complex entanglement with my mother, my grief-filled relationship with my father, and my reliance on clothing as a lifeline and tool for mending. In dialogue with clothing lovers, fiber artists, evolutionary biologists, historians, and environmentalists, *Mendings* also tells a broader story: a story about how clothing both perpetuates and counters historical and ongoing harms of systemic racism, incarceration, and environmental devastation and a story about textiles as sources of creativity, artistry, and self-fashioning.

The essays generate insights about the difference between mending and fixing, the relationship between dress and redress, and the never-ending ways in which mending alters our relationships with ourselves and others, both living and deceased. *Mendings* also addresses an array of pressing questions: How do we make sense of fragments that will never add up to a whole? What is the alchemy for converting scarcity and need into artistry and passion? What roles does beauty play amid violence, damage, and constraint? And how might individual efforts to mend compete with or complement collective forms of mending?

While writing *Mendings*, I have gathered discarded and adored bits of family texts and textiles, revisited childhood letters and journals, and filled my apron with offerings from friends: a poem about greeting oneself and a poem about shoes; beautiful passages from Virginia Woolf; essays about clothing, parent/child relationships, family photographs, wounds, prodigal daughters, and peacocks. I have wrestled with friends' crucial questions ("Is *everything* mending?" "When is mending a form of discarding?") and accompanied my students as they wrestle with their own pressing questions about dress and redress. Through my woolgathering—bending, extending, shaking out the air—I have come to understand why a young girl's nightgown, an enslaved woman's homemade buttons, an incarcerated woman's burnt uniform, and a faded dress bedecked with visible mending deserve to be gathered, and honored, in a single apron.

Bits of beauty created by artists in my own family adorn the pages of *Mendings*: my mother's paintings, my niece's ornaments and sketches, my husband's photographs, my sister's pencil drawing, and my own knitting, quilting, sewing, and artwork. One weekend in 2018, our house was transformed into an artist colony as my husband, niece, and a family friend took photos, doodled, stitched, sketched, and made rubbings of textured clothing to include in *Mendings*. Occasionally pausing to share homemade sour cherry pie and butter pecan ice cream, we'd peruse our family keepsakes, recount funny stories, and reminisce about times of blossoming and times of brokenness, cherishing the chance to be just where we wanted to be: *in* it, mending with people we love, finding beauty and connection through our sifting and sorting. The weekend reminded me of the labor, time, and material commitment that mending requires, the multigenerational, roll-up-your-sleeves work necessary for addressing the presence of the past. It reminded me, too, that my own keepsakes are communal: the offspring of many hands, minds, and hearts, part of a collective effort to tend to, and mend, the brokenness that surrounds us.

> You're given just so much to work with in a life and you have to do the best you can with what you got. That's what piecing is. The materials is passed on to you or is all you can afford to buy . . . that's just what's given to you. Your fate. But the way you put them together is your business. You can put them in any order you like. —ANONYMOUS TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN QUILTER, quoted in Elaine Showalter, "Piecing and Writing" (1986)

Searching for what's necessary and what can be discarded, I gather bits of text and textile. Themes begin to take shape: my fusion with my mother, my lifelong efforts to connect with my father, my ongoing attempts to grow around and between the gaps, absences, and holes. Piece by piece, I start stitching fragments together. A place for everything and everything in its place.

1

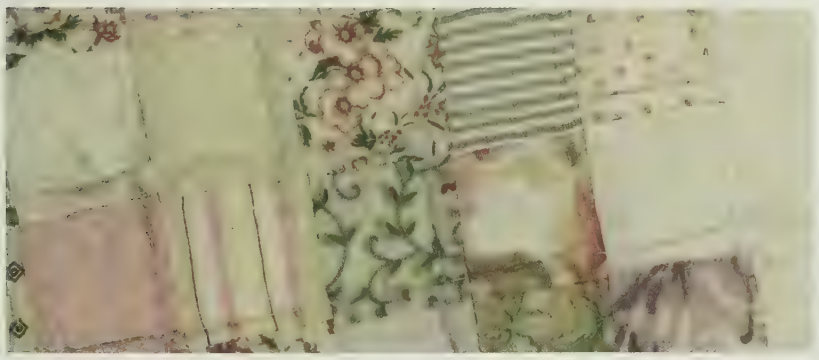
Selvedge

My mother and I had got tangled up, like skeins.
—Jill Lepore, "The Prodigal Daughter" (2013)

1

I am chasing my mother around our house, trying to prevent her from discarding a heap of tattered nightgowns that belong to my older sisters and me. The nightgowns feel like part of me, and I can't bear my mom throwing them away.

Fifty years later, I catch my breath as I recall the smell of the flannel, the urgency, the chase.

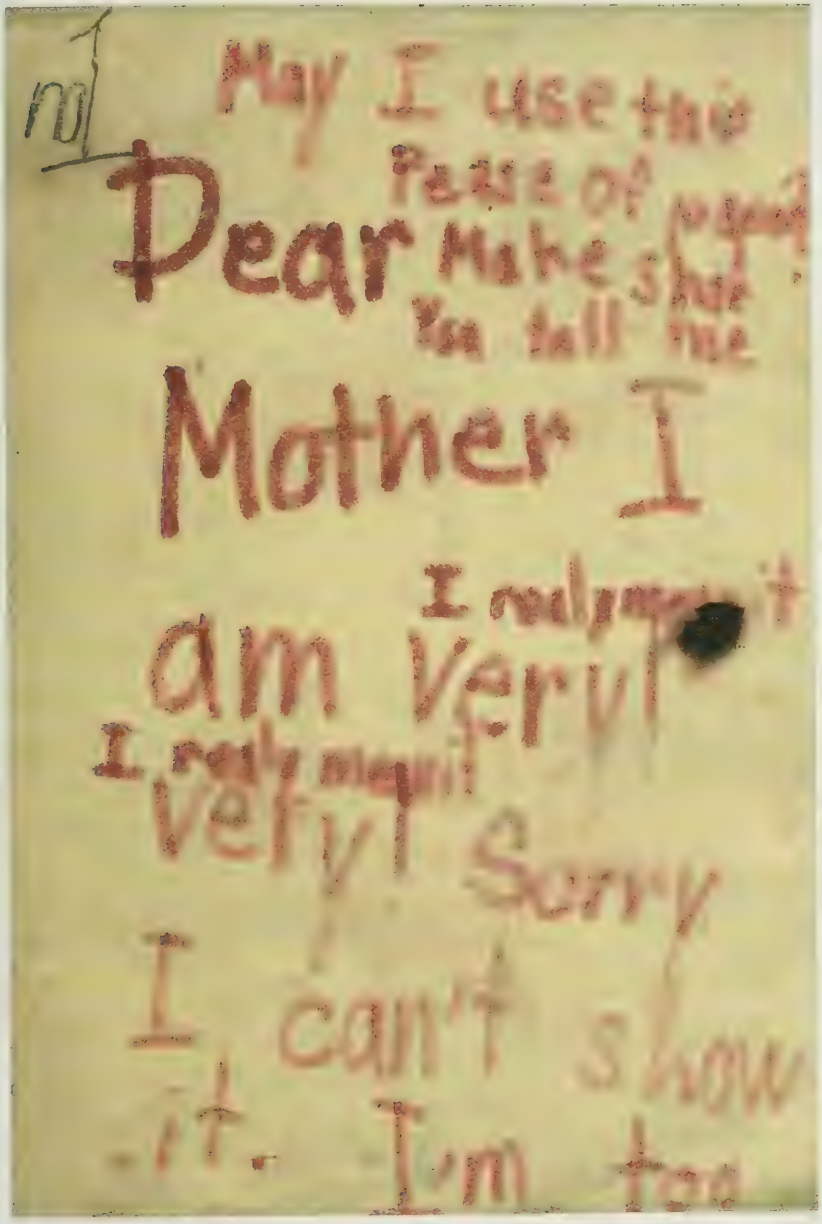


I am two years old, and my parents are on their way to Florida. My mom has just given birth to a stillborn, who would have been the seventh child in our family.

Feeling anxious with my mother gone, I stand on a chair at the kitchen sink and drink some green dishwashing liquid. One of my sisters cares for me when the detergent makes me sick. When my mother comes home, she gives me a gift of clothing: a blue-and-gold-striped vest and matching shorts.

My hat habit begins at age four, when my mother forgets me at the grocery store. I start with a floppy, paisley beach hat and then collect other eye-catching options: a long, knitted stocking cap with white, orange, and brown stripes; a red-and-white captain's hat from the Gateway Clipper Fleet; a brown wool ski cap; and a Russian fur hat with ear flaps that fold up at its crown. These hats are part of my everyday outfits until I turn seven. Big girls, I'm told, don't wear hats.

At age five, I write daily letters to my mother: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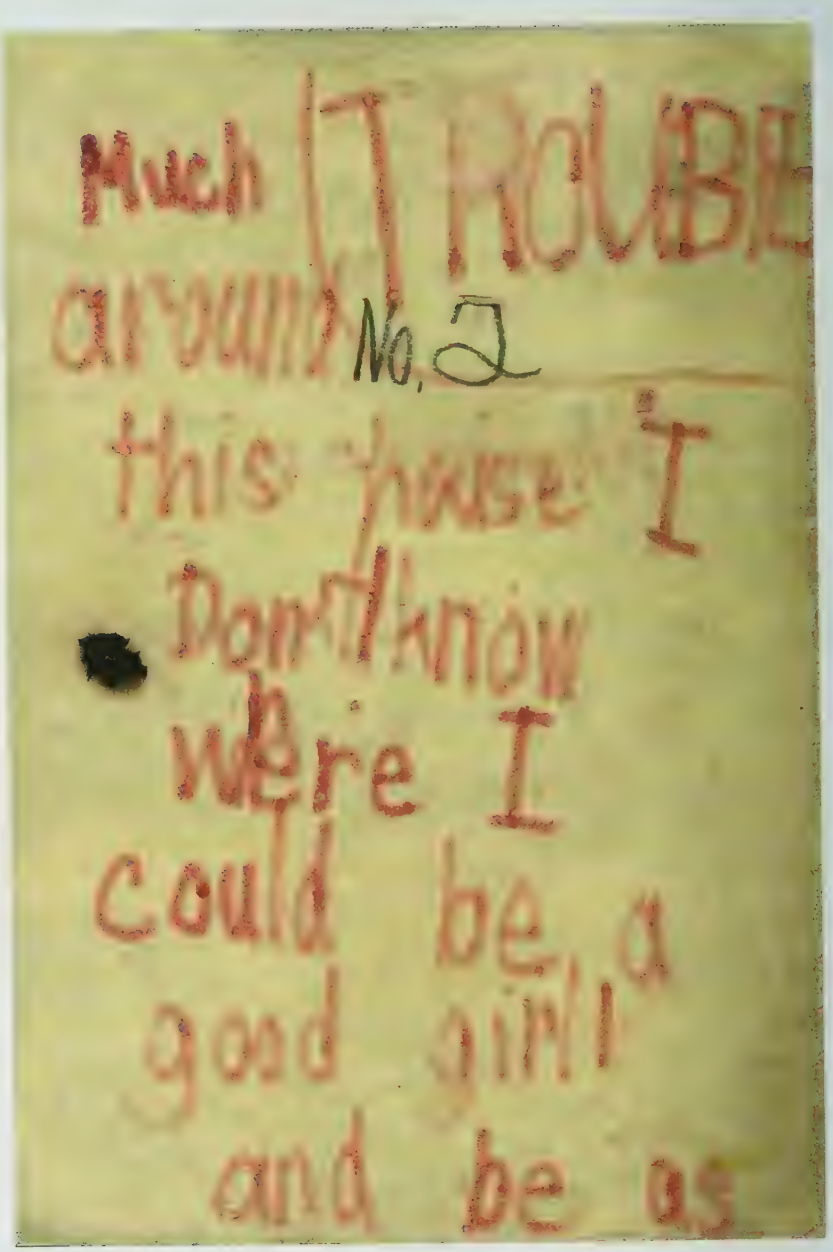
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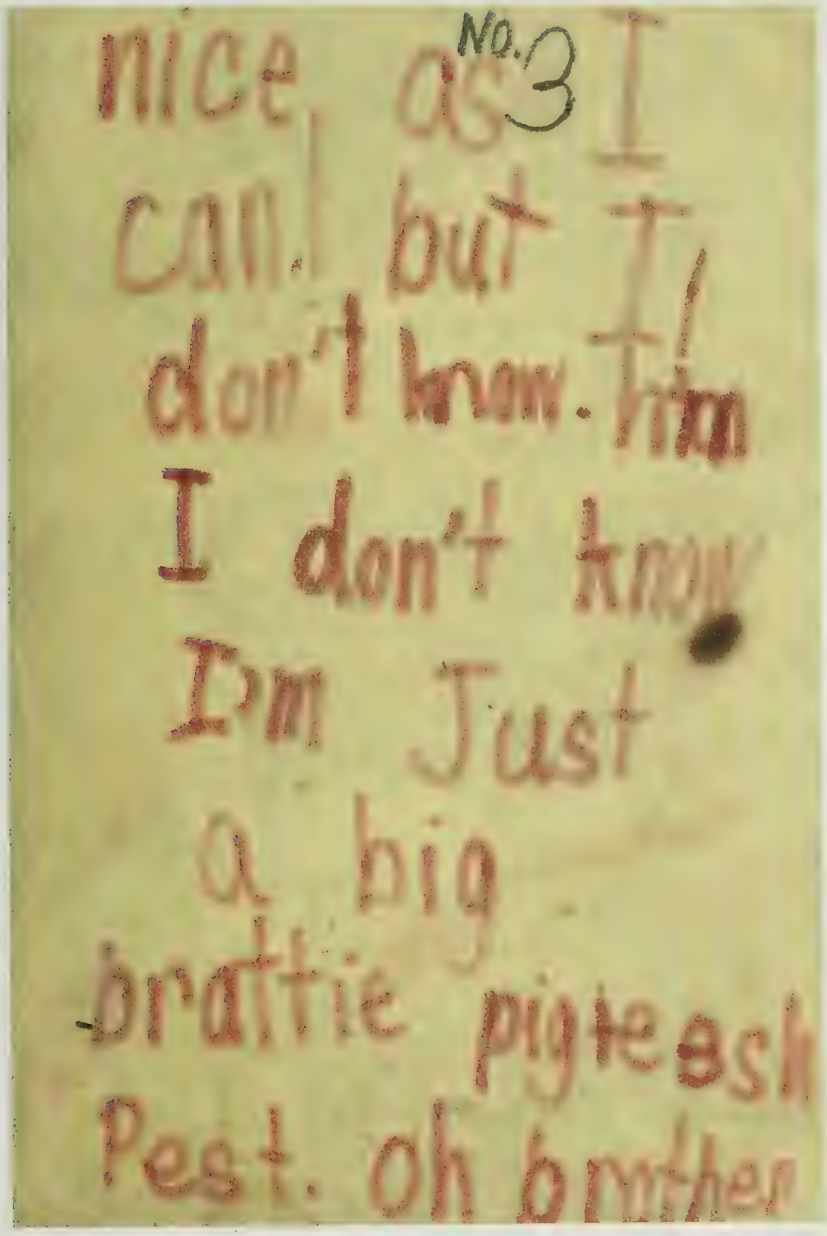
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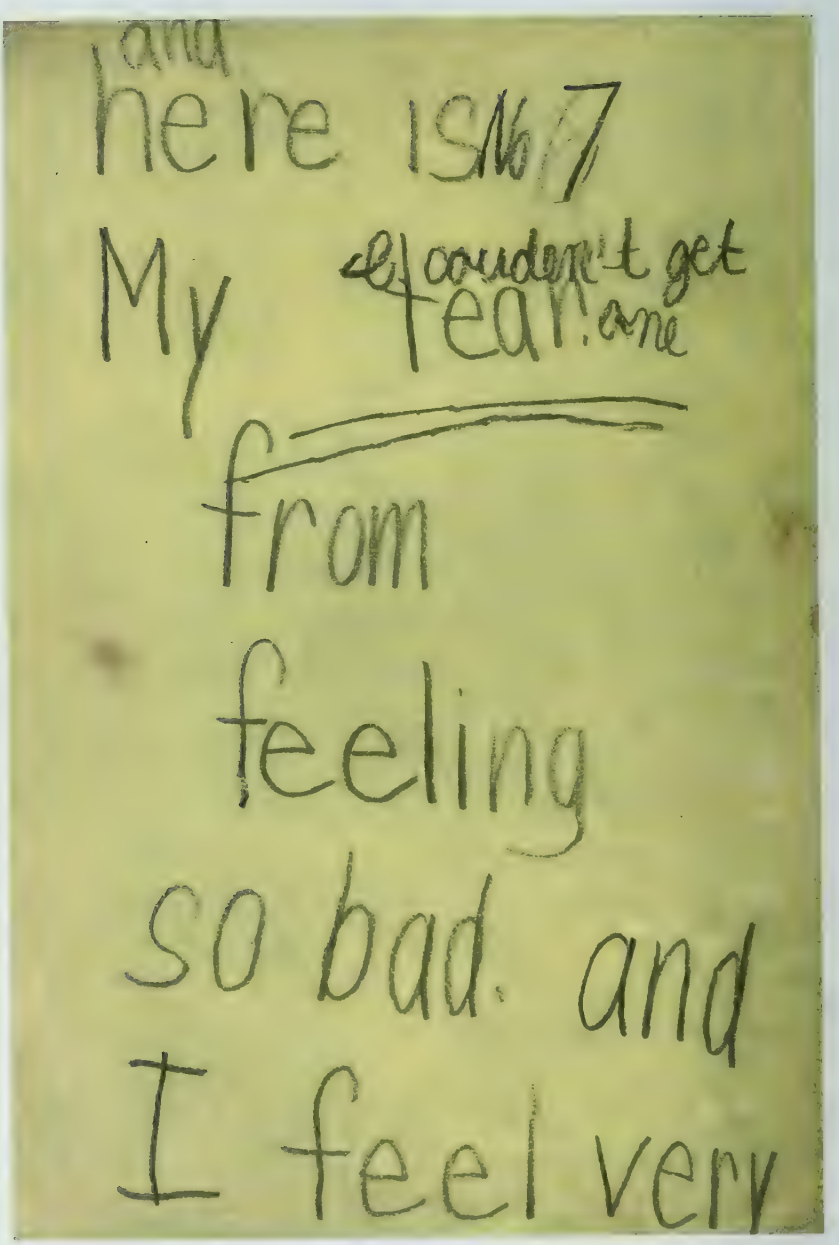
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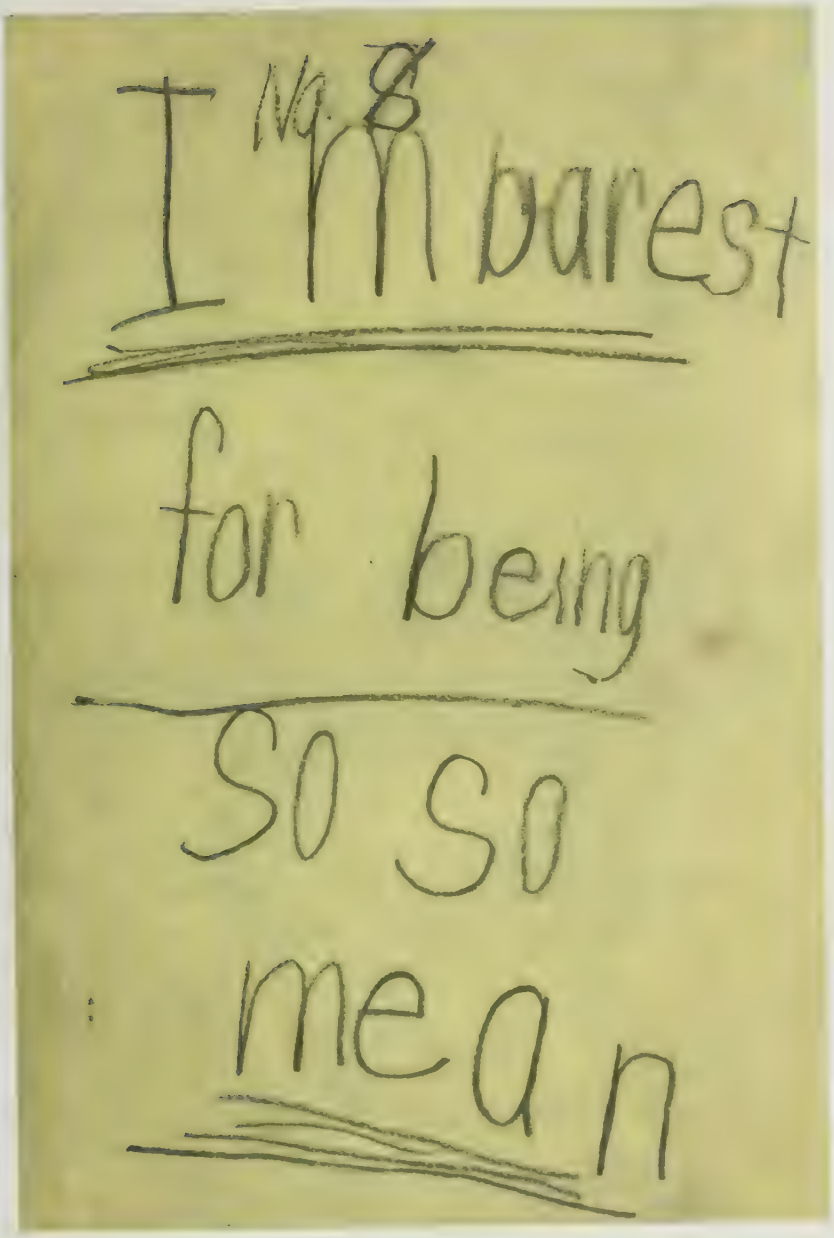
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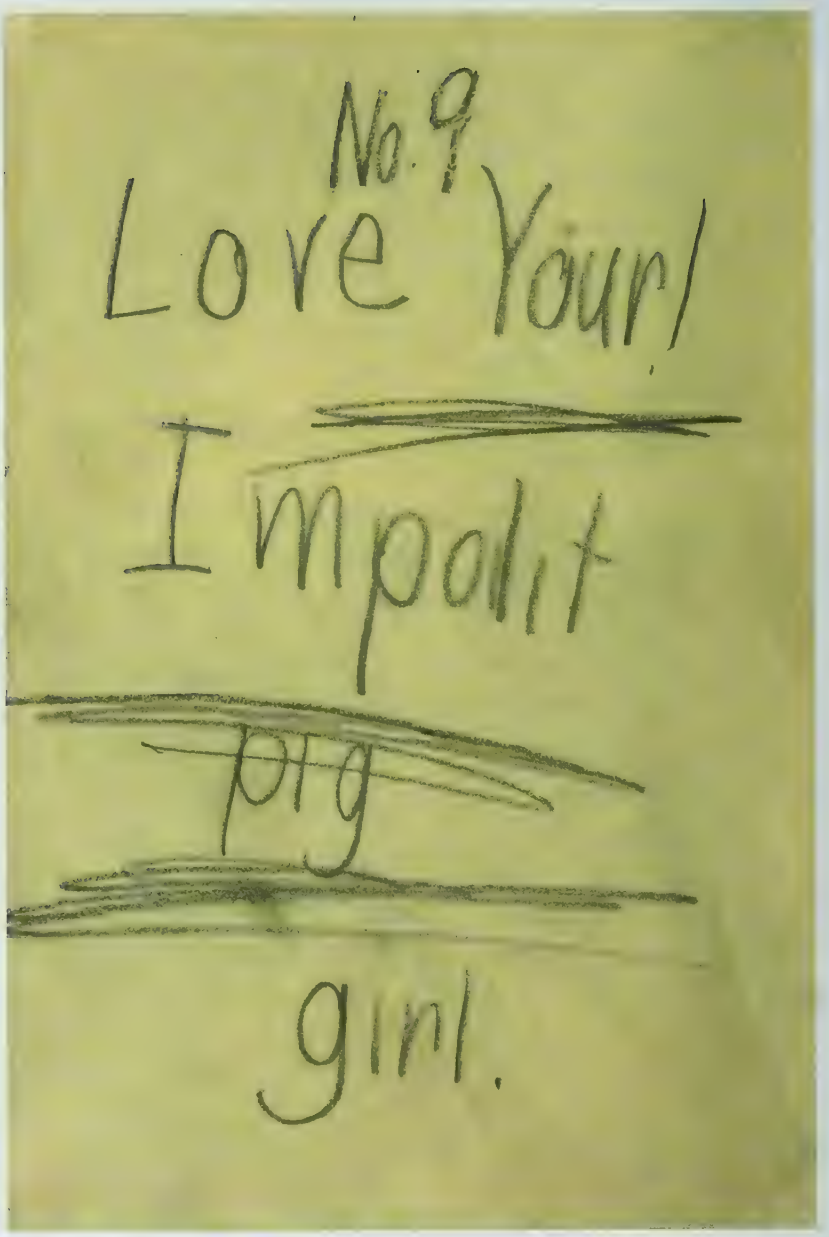
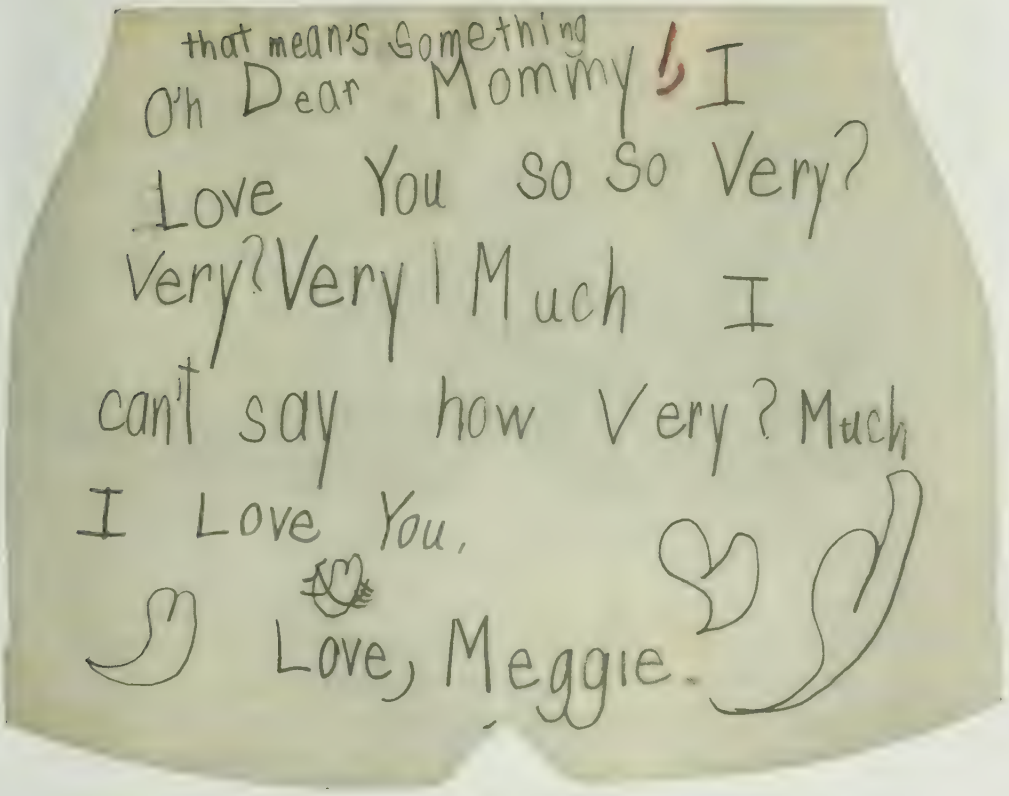
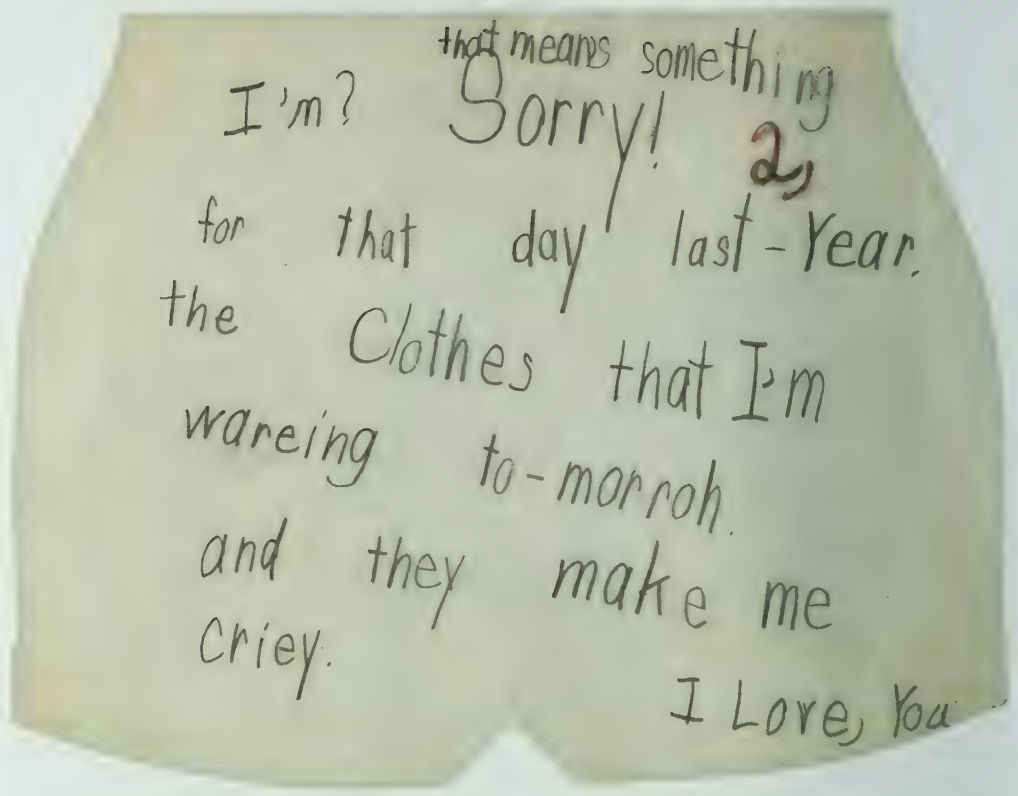

No. 9
Love Your
Impolit
pig
girl.

When my mom finally takes her place at the dinner table, she rests her lit cigarette on the edge of her plate and falls asleep. I often linger at the table with one of my sisters. We love to lick our plates clean and return them to the cupboard before my mom wakes up.

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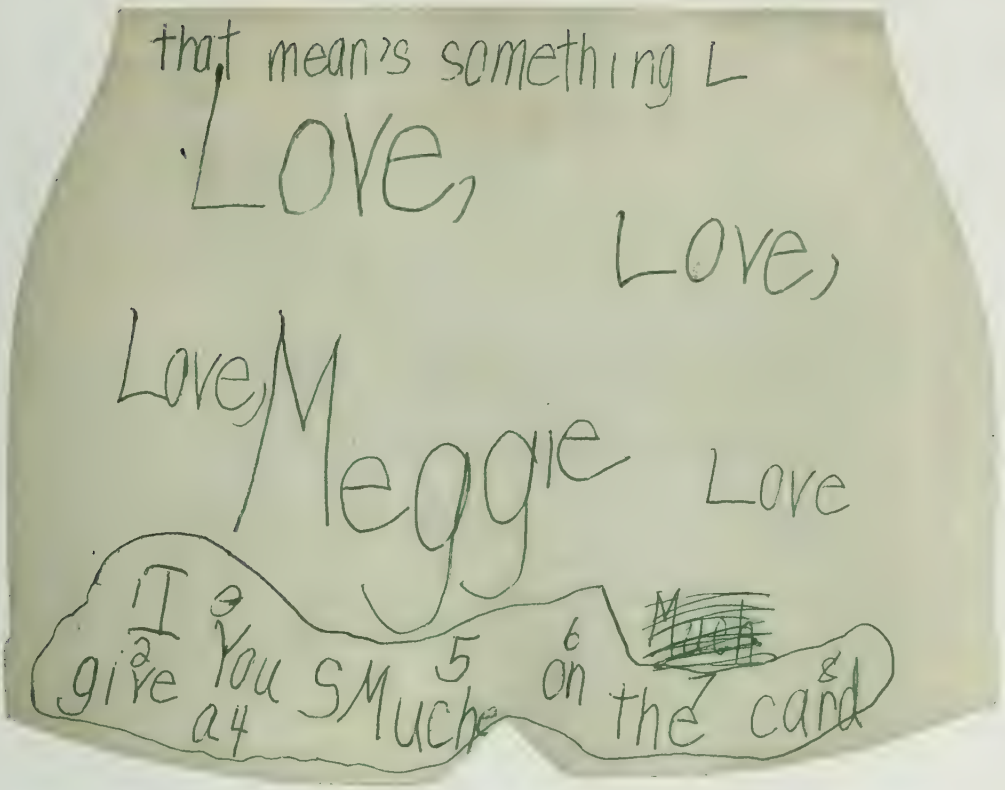
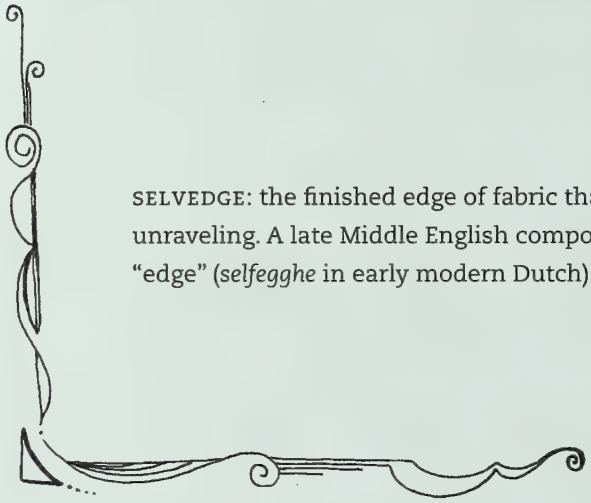


Sitting on the floor of my bedroom, I jab my mustard-colored sneakers with a pair of scissors. I've been making a new hole in them every week since I started first grade because I want my world to be like my cousins' world with their squeaky-clean white sneakers and perfectly folded ankle socks.

I change my clothes several times a day, searching for the right outfit.

Every afternoon, I chase my mother's car down the street as she leaves for her social work classes. Crying and desperately waving goodbye, I feel certain that I will never see her again.

Every night, I lie awake until I hear the sound of her voice.



SELVEDGE: the finished edge of fabric that prevents it from unraveling. A late Middle English composite of "self" and "edge" (*selfegghe* in early modern Dutch).[1]

My mother, Sally, was born in 1934, followed by her sister Charlotte in 1936. My grandmother meticulously chronicled the first months of my mom's life in a baby book, with captions such as "2 days short of a month old!," "Her first snow," and "Chewing the bed." Soon, though, my grandmother's weak heart and gangrene confined her to bed, and she died when my mother was seven.

"I think the garden work is helping to clear up my head," my grandmother writes in a 1939 letter to her own mother, describing how she planted lettuce with my five-year-old mother, planted nasturtiums with my three-year-old aunt, and filled the house with "great big bunches of snow balls." Though my grandmother didn't live long enough to witness her daughters' blooming, she cultivated their love of gardening.

When she had a semi-permanent layer of dirt under her fingernails and had been stooping for so long that she couldn't straighten her back, my mother seemed happy. Poring over *Wayside Gardens* for weeks at a time, my mom would draw meticulous diagrams of flower beds, rose gardens, meandering stone paths, and shady nooks with birdbaths and stone figurines. Fueled only by cigarettes and the heat of the sun, she would wrestle with weeds and stumps (the more tenacious, the better), cart wheelbarrow after wheelbarrow of soil, and use every iota of her strength to wrest beauty from the earth. She was in her element when choosing the perfect peony blossom to grace a glass bowl, hosting a "Strawberries in the Garden" gathering, or yanking weeds while dressed for a wedding. Even in her later years, as cancer blossomed in her lungs, my mother radiated vitality in tending her garden.

Sally Sweeney,
page from
sketchbook, 1994.

Portrait of My Mother (Written by Her Sister)

My earliest memories of [Sally] were of a rather feisty, energetic soul who was always looking for something fun and adventuresome to do. She walked on the top boards of fences, shinnied all the way up to the top of the swing poles in the school yard, climbed the highest trees and could hit a softball the farthest. She and Pat Eckenrode set the standard for every day's scariest feats. She never played "dolls"; she played "dungeons." The dolls were captives, never babies. "Hide 'n seek" was really "Cops and Robbers" or "Cowboys and Indians." Only sissies cried and whined, and Sally never did either.

Maureen Sweeney
(sister of the author),
For Mom—Gardener's Daydream, 2003.

She bore seven children in nine years—six of whom survived—and helped to raise four foster children. My parents were poor at first, but my mother looked back on those years with nostalgia, fondly recalling her efforts to make ends meet as my dad worked during the day and earned his law degree at night. As my dad's legal career burgeoned, so did his drinking. By the time I was old enough to notice, my parents were sleeping in separate beds. I first saw them kiss when I was eleven years old, after an overseas business trip momentarily rekindled their romance.

With her husband lost to his liquid, my mother made me her companion, confidante, and coconspirator. The thirty-three years stretching between us vanished as we folded laundry on winter afternoons or sat outside on summer nights singing along with our favorite records and eating butter pecan ice cream.

How does one become a detangler? —#TANGLEDYARN

"Parties, parties everywhere!" my mom exclaims in the weekly newspaper column she wrote as a high school senior, describing a "slam-bang" social calendar that "even a debutante or a politician" would find daunting. In their yearbook inscriptions and in their recollections fifty years later, my mother's friends highlight her "ever-ready laugh," "gutsy" escapades, and personality "as flashy as her red hair." Renowned for being "the card of the Freshman class" and a college senior who "stood on the picnic table, and with a cigarette in one hand and a can of Rolling Rock in the other, began to serenade her friends," my mom embraced Auntie Mame's credo to "Live! Live! Live!"

By age five, I'm an expert at making my mother laugh. She especially likes my deadpan recitation of Simon and Garfunkel's "Mrs. Robinson": "Coo, coo, ca-choo, Mrs. Robinson . . . / Heaven holds a place for those who pray / Hey, hey, hey."[2]

Alone in the quiet of my bedroom, I turn my bookshelf into a four-story house and invent lives for my bookshelf inhabitants. The family has problems—the father stopped going to church—but overall, their world is even-keeled. Each summer, I save money to buy furnishings from the dollhouse store: a trundle bed, a china lamp, an old-fashioned writing desk with a quill pen, real drawers, and a bench with a burgundy velvet cushion. With the help of a do-it-yourself book from my grandmother, I make a couch, pillows, children's beds, and tiny books. Then, as a surprise Christmas gift, my mom asks a family friend to make me a dollhouse. Over the next few years, I furnish my house with a cast-iron stove, a porcelain bathtub and sink, a rotating globe, a birdhouse and a mailbox, a hobbyhorse, potted plants, a Bundt pan and a tea set, a gramophone, a music stand, cereal boxes and canned goods, a miniature calendar and *Life* magazines, and a full deck of playing cards. My house even has a tiny cat with a spilled pail of milk.

I recall my mother loudly laughing at the wake for her half brother, who drowned while rescuing two of his children from an ocean riptide. I recall her loudly laughing again, fourteen years later, at the wake for her favorite brother-in-law. I have only two memories of my mother crying: (1) when she made a besotted New Year's Eve plea that my siblings and I stay in touch with each other, and (2) when we sprinkled her lakeside garden with the ashes of my sister's dog.

Members of the online community Knot a Problem untangle yarn for free as long as the sender covers shipping costs; some members even pay knitters to send their knottiest balls of yarn. Detanglers describe their work as deeply satisfying, a means to create order from chaos and turn a "mess" into "something lovable."[3]

Techniques vary: spreading the yarn on a table, looking for the ends of the skein, using a pin or crochet hook to loosen knots, or freezing fuzzy yarns to prevent their fibers from locking together during the untangling.

What does not vary is this cardinal rule: one should never resort to scissors.

My mother doesn't respond to my childhood letters. But when I perform heart surgery on Raggedy Ann, my mom mends my doll's wound with red thread and a thick patch of orange felt.

She also comes to the rescue when I discover that Suzy, my Holly Hobbie doll, is bald under her bonnet except for a single strand of hair connecting her wispy braids.

Using heavyweight golden yarn, my mom makes Suzy a full head of hair gathered into two knee-length braids. Her expert repair makes it okay for Suzy to take off her hat.

When I save up my money and buy a kit to make an old-fashioned china doll, my mom brings Gretel to life by sewing a cloth body and attaching her porcelain head, delicate hands, and dainty button-up boots. Using leftover fabrics from her own handmade clothing, my mom makes Gretel an elegant wardrobe: a long Kelly green skirt; a floral blouse with a green grosgrain ruffle and a pair of matching bloomers; a velvet-lined plaid bonnet and tweed cape.

My aunt claims that as a child, my mom pulled out her own tooth on the way to the dentist. True or not, this story confirms what I know about my mother's relationship to her body. She went nonstop, running on fumes and then falling asleep wherever she finally sat down, whether at the dinner table or the altar at church, in full view of the congregation. She often ate her first and only meal—sugar-heaped cornflakes—around nine p.m. She indiscriminately blasted various skin conditions with wart medicine that expired years before. And when pulmonary disease left her gasping for breath, she drank Chardonnay to "loosen her pipes" rather than using her oxygen mask.

Bodies are TROUBLE, I learn early on. When the STREEKER locks me in the bathroom and removes my clothes, I say nothing. But the saints in my library books help me to understand body trouble: suffering is holy, something to strive for.

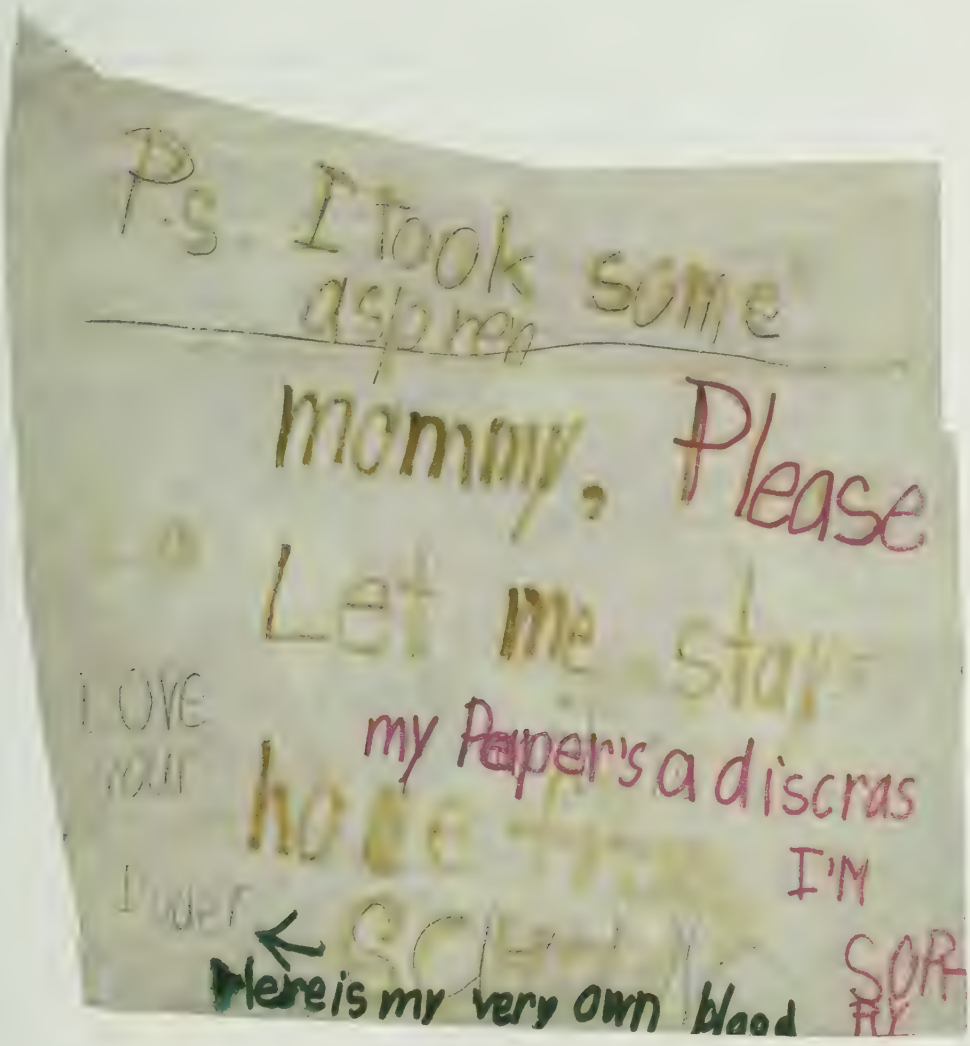
To increase my daily hardship, I do hours of homework that my teachers have not assigned, say "please" one hundred times when I pray for God's help, fasten every button on my cardigans when I hang them up, wash dishes at family parties while my cousins run around outside, and go to church every morning before school starts instead of playing with other kids. As I pray the rosary on weekend mornings, I stand on my bed with my arms extended like Jesus on the cross, gouging my hands with my fingernails to simulate nails piercing my flesh.

But if bodies are TROUBLE, they also speak, sometimes louder than words.

At age four, I wrap my knee in an ace bandage and sit in our neighbor's yard, hoping that someone will notice me.

When my mom tenderly treats my brother's poison ivy rash, I rub my entire body with poison ivy leaves, including my eyes. For more than a week, I am covered head to toe with a severe rash.

At age seven, I feign that I have lung disease and miss three weeks of school.

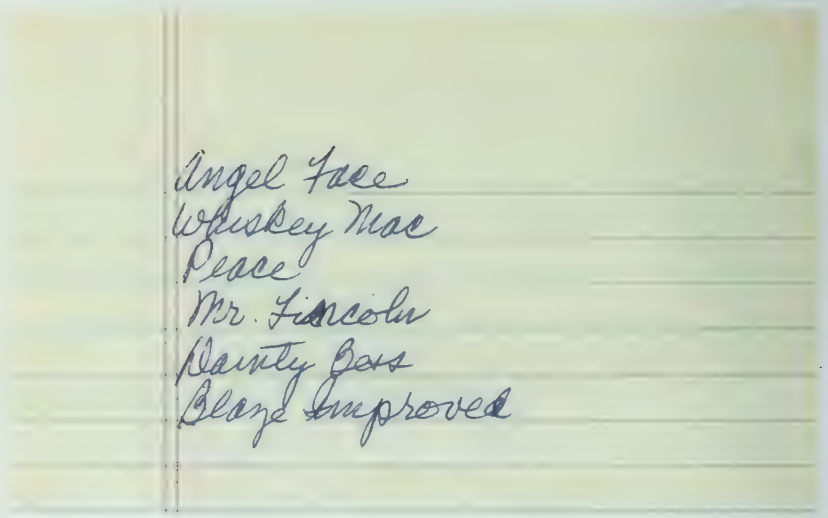


A shoelace to brace the dishwasher rack, a bobby pin to fix the toaster: few things satisfied my mom more than "making do" with whatever was at hand. She repeatedly reupholstered an antique loveseat, re-stained humdrum furniture to make it "rustic," and for fifty years covered and re-covered the seats of dining room chairs salvaged from a neighbor's trash.

When my dad suggested that my mom try a professional decorator since money was no longer tight, the experiment lasted two days: one for the decorator to haul in her décor and one for her to haul it out. The white leather couch, furry pillows, glass-topped table, and plush fish-shaped rugs charmed my dad, but the rest of us couldn't wait to get them out of the house. My mother's taste centered on lived-in comfort: a faded brown corduroy couch, hodgepodge of repurposed furniture, do-it-yourself wallpaper, and threadbare Persian rug.

Rarely a day went by without my mom making a list. After she died, I found lists all over her house:

Roses



Plants

— Ligularia: The Rocket
— Iberis: Candytuft
— Tradescantia: Spiderwort
— Stachys: Lamb's Ears

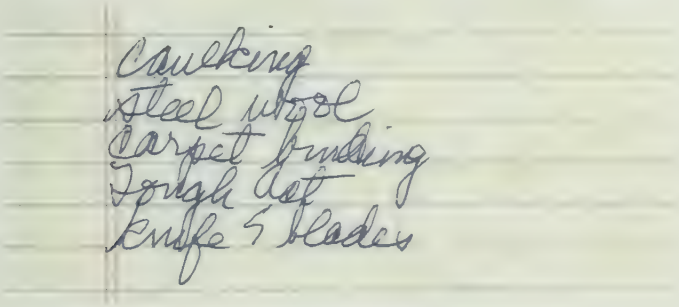
Cacti

— Old Man Cactus: has beard
— Spanish Dagger: use spines as needles, fibers for cloth
— Aloe: Columbus called it "the Dr. in a pot"
— Pencil tree: branches in water stun fish to catch

Watercolors

— Rose Madder
— Aureolin
— Burnt Umber
— Cerulean Blue

Home Improvement Supplies



It's a Laura Ingalls Wilder dress—thrilling enough—but even more thrilling is the fact that my mom is making it for me. I choose a crazy-quilt fabric for the dress, Kelly green fabric for the pinafore, white-and-yellow polka-dot fabric for the lining and sash, and tiny yellow buttons that my mom sews down the front of the pinafore.

I find the finishing touch in a travel-stop gift shop: a denim-blue bonnet decorated with fuzzy red butterflies.

When I become obsessed with knickers, my mom cuts my pastel plaid pants just below the knee and sutures each leg with an elastic band. She also makes me a gray wool "tabard": a sleeveless, open-sided vest that slips over my head and fastens on each side with a fabric tie. I love the exotic word *tabard* as much as the garment itself.

> Bundling: when "a given quality is contingently (rather than by logical necessity or social convention) bound up with other qualities" and this cluster of qualities is attached to an object. —WEBB KEANE, "Signs Are Not the Garb of Meaning" (2006)

My other favorite clothes are gifts from my mother: a hunter-green velvet dress with a crocheted ivory collar, a green and red plaid kilt from England, and an Irish wool cardigan with round leather buttons and two front patch pockets. I wear the dress until the velvet disintegrates and the kilt until I can no longer fasten the straps. The cardigan is my second skin; I don't even shed it for a spelunking trip that has me crawling through narrow passageways and wading through muddy pools.

My letters to my mother—ongoing, though less frequent—mark the passage of time as a series of endings: "This is my last letter to you on a Monday in March in 1974." "Today is the last time that we'll have grilled cheese on a snowy Thursday in February."

I'm ten years old and terribly homesick at summer camp. Knowing that I would never break the rules, my mom sends me a tongue-in-cheek letter about my delinquent behavior:

24 June, 1977

Dear Meg,

Saw Mrs. Lyons at church yesterday & she gave us a report on you. Said you were misbehaving, per usual, had been caught smoking, were on probation and all the rest.

Disgraceful!

We had a ball at the wedding, in fact, all weekend was fun. Scooter got a bath on Friday for the occasion & doesn't quite know what to do with herself. And last night we cooked a huge fish that Dad bought—it was great except that I didn't clean the scales off and they were rather a problem! There's another one in the freezer for next Sunday.

Have fun!

Love,
Mom

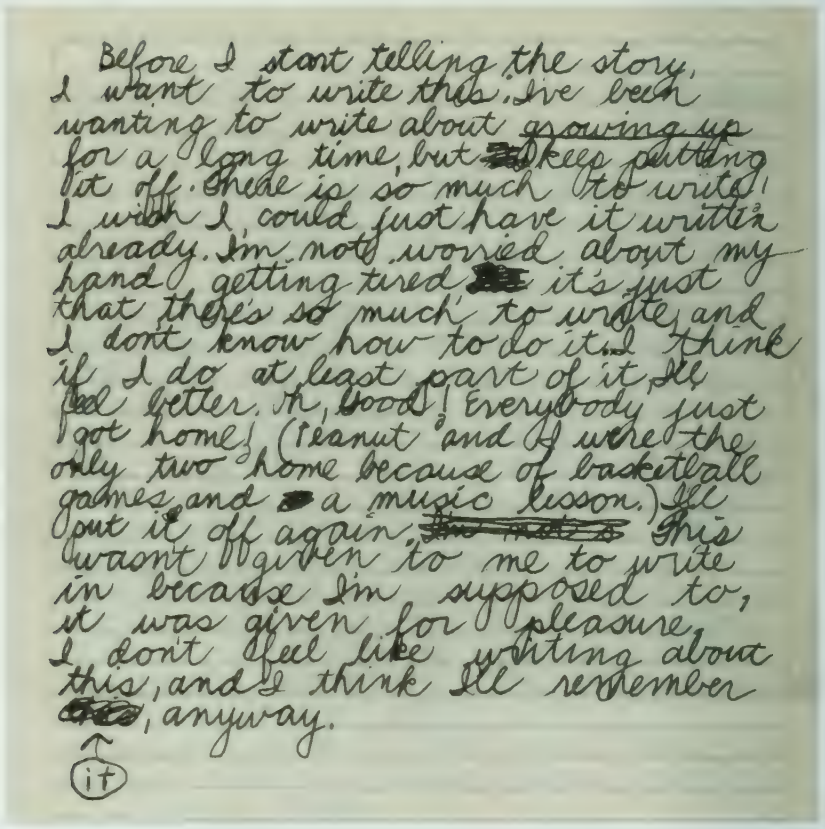
Portrait of My Mother (Found Poetry from Wayside Gardens)

The Rising Sun
Magical Flame
Glow Girl
Limelight
Magic Giant
Samaritan Phantom
Tuff Stuff
Contrast in Styles

Megan Sweeney,
Leaving, 1993.

"My biggest worry is when my parents will die," states my fourth-grade autobiography. But when I look more closely at the page, I see that I originally wrote, "My biggest worry is how I'll act when I'm a teenager." Surrounded by teenagers who challenged my parents' authority, I must have found it less threatening to imagine my parents' death than to imagine a time when I, too, might want some distance.

Journal Entry, 2/1/1978


Before I start telling the story,
I want to write this. I've been
wanting to write about growing up
for a long time, but keep putting
it off. There is so much to write!
I wish I could just have it written
already. I'm not worried about my
hand getting tired [redacted] it's just
that there's so much to write, and
I don't know how to do it. I think
if I do at least part of it, I'll
feel better. Oh, good! Everybody just
got home. (Peanut and I were the
only two home because of basketball
games and [redacted] a music lesson.) I'll
put it off again. [redacted] This
wasn't given to me to write
in because I'm supposed to,
it was given for pleasure.
I don't feel like writing about
this, and I think I'll remember
[redacted], anyway.
↑
(it)

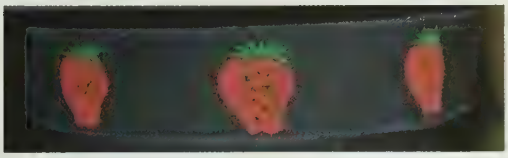
This passage is the final entry in my childhood journals.

The French word for selvedge is *lisière*. Holding a child *en lisière* refers to the centuries-old practice of fashioning a harness from the edge of a sheet to support a child as she learns to walk.

"Young Child Housekeeper helping a very young child to walk he is dressed in a little sailor suit but he is provided with a Bourlet and still wears selvedges." French Fashion and Costumes Gallery, 32nd. Cahier de Costumes Français, 25th Suite of Fashionable Clothing, 1780. Designed by Pierre-Thomas LeClerc. Engraved by Nicolas Dupin. Published by Esnauts et Rapilly, Paris, France. From Blum, *Eighteenth-Century French Fashion Plates in Full Color*, 36.

My mom forgoes discussion of the birds and bees, and I grow increasingly estranged from my developing body. In sixth grade, I learn that I need to wear deodorant when I see boys in my class laughing as one boy holds his nose and points at me. In seventh grade, my entire body visibly shakes during a ballet recital, and my hands shake so badly while I'm playing piano for a full-school assembly that I have to cut my performance short. In eighth grade, I try to make peace with my ungovernable body by trying out for the basketball team, but during my only two minutes on the court, my glasses are knocked off and I miss a free throw. In ninth grade, a classmate whispers, "Turn red!" every day during band class; in this context, my body always complies.

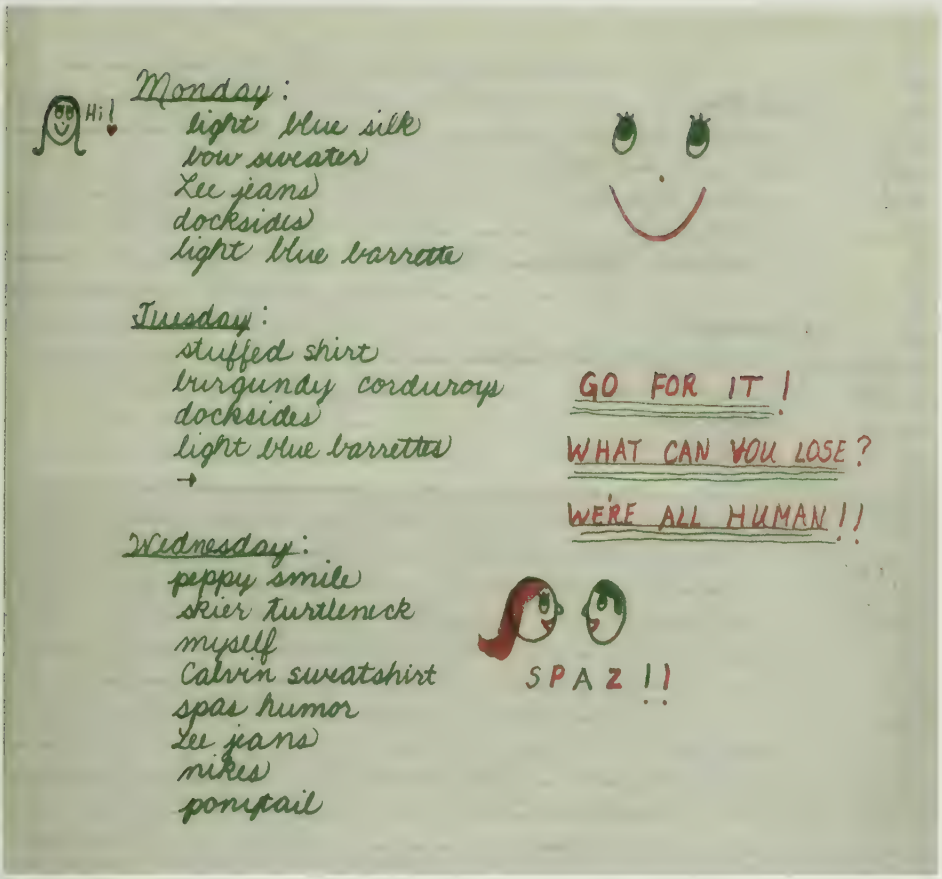
I'm standing in a checkout line at age thirteen, trying to decide between two white polo shirts: one decorated with whales and the other with strawberries. For more than fifteen minutes, my sister patiently waits as I wrestle with my decision: Which is the *right* choice? Am I a strawberry person or a whale person? What kind of person do others think I should be? After deciding that I'm a strawberry person, I go all in with strawberry-laden earrings, shoelaces, and barrettes.

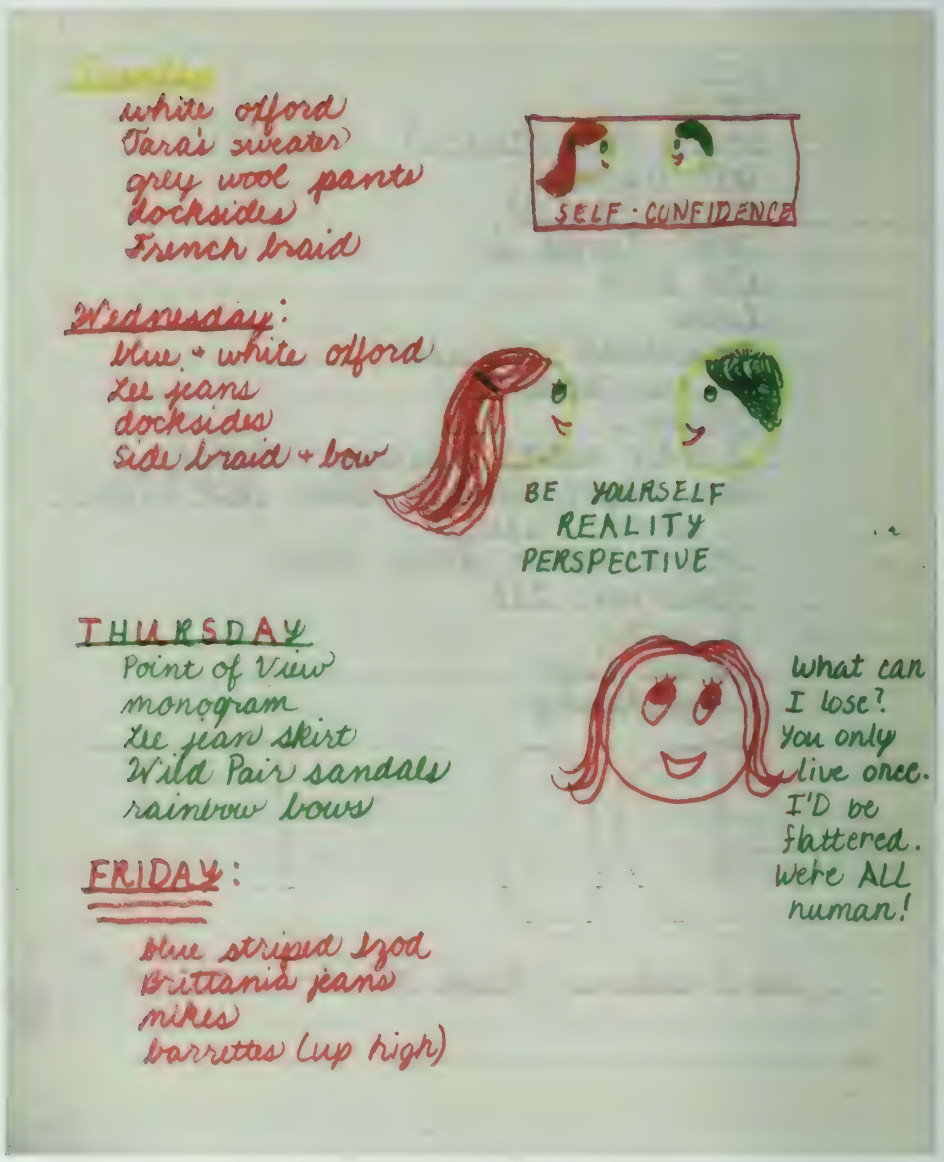


On my first night of wearing a back brace to correct my C-curved spine, I'm crying in my bed, feeling panicked, alone, and trapped in my metal cage. Wondering how I'll make it through the next hour, let alone the next two years, I listen to sounds of the neighborhood party my parents are attending. As the night wears on, I hear raucous singing as our neighbor bangs out ragtime songs on his piano.

"Are you the Bionic Woman?" a boy in the neighborhood asks when he sees the padded metal ring circling my neck, thick metal rods extending from chin to pelvis, and hard plastic encasing my hips.

I am a hermit crab inhabiting an ill-fitting shell. To make my shell feel like home, I focus on its adornment: high-neck blouses and turtlenecks, pants and skirts large enough to accommodate plastic hips. Throughout ninth grade, I keep a daily record of my outfits for school. In the margins of my record, I draw faces and write encouraging notes to help me overcome my extreme shyness:


Hi!
Monday:
light blue silk
bow sweater
Lee jeans
docksides
light blue barrette
Tuesday:
stuffed shirt
burgundy corduroys
docksides
light blue barrettes
→
Wednesday:
peppy smile
skier turtleneck
myself
Calvin sweatshirt
spaz humor
Lee jeans
nikes
ponytail
GO FOR IT!
WHAT CAN YOU LOSE?
WE'RE ALL HUMAN!!
SPAZ!!



The body is an "osmotic shell," write fashion theorists Alexandra Warwick and Dani Cavallaro; we "*assimilate*" garments and make them "our *flesh*."[4]

On my first trip home from college, my mom hoots with laughter when she spots me at the baggage claim. I've just changed my clothes in the airport bathroom, trading my sweater and jeans for a 1960s halter-style jumpsuit made of multicolored, fluorescent polyester. I want to make light of the idea that kids drastically change when they go to college, and I know my mom will get the joke.

For Christmas, my mom gives me a sewing machine and some luxurious wool fabrics with paisley and abstract prints. Instead of going home for spring break, my roommate and I spend the entire week designing and sewing clothes until the wee hours of the morning.

Portrait of My Mother (From the Pittsburgh Press)

> The 52-year-old Bethel Park woman, mother of six grown children and a social worker by profession, is slim and freckle-faced, a blue-eyed blonde with the American look of Amelia Earhart.[5]

My mom is one of only six women in her flying club, and after a year of studying the flight manuals strewn across our kitchen table and a year of withstanding her belligerent, belittling instructor—an air force veteran who punches her in the arm when she makes a mistake—she demands the reporter's respect: "Nobody plays games with airplanes. The eye-brain coordination is challenging. It's a lot different from driving a car. Four dimensions instead of two."

I'm by my mother's side for her first solo flight in her two-seater Cessna. As we circle and circle in the air trying to locate my aunt's house, my mom's upbeat chatter suggests that everything is A-OK. But after twenty years as her copilot, I'm keenly attuned to turbulence. Caught between my cherished role as sidekick and my instinct for self-preservation, I suggest that we've had a great adventure and should maybe head home. My mother will not countenance fear or defeat, but with the

gas gauge pointing toward empty, she starts to land the plane, panic rising as we descend, fiercely gripping the controls as we touch ground and veer off the runway. When the plane glides to a stop, we catch our breath amid nervous giggles and agree that we should spare my dad the details. Grateful for two dimensions instead of four, we then walk to our car and head home.

Megan Sweeney, *Air Traffic Control*, 2018.

2

While studying in Paris during my junior year of college, I buy a thick, navy knit dress with a Henley neckline and flounced skirt. The dense fabric conceals my prominent hip bones and helps me to manage feeling incurably cold. As the year continues, I layer skirts on top of my dress in an effort to stay warm.

Fashion is not what captivates me in the fashion capital of the world; I'm held captive by the flesh beneath my clothes. Clothing has become a means to cloak my disappearing body, a body that increasingly consumes me the less I consume.

My parents never contact me during my year abroad.

I am standing at the threshold of adulthood trying to stop time in its tracks.

A stern taskmaster, I bring my body to heel. I won't broker with hunger, need, or desire, and I let Father Time know that I am in charge.

Like a fragile net, my clothing seems to be all that prevents a total unraveling of the edges of my self.

3

When I return from France, I visit one of my sisters to attend her graduation from business school. Before the ceremony, my sister asks me to try on several dresses that belong to her roommate because she wants me to wear something that conceals my bony body. She decides on a boxy Kelly green dress with shoulder pads, large gold buttons, and a wide black belt.

"Write a description of yourself," my counselor says. I write a description of another sister and then compare myself with her point by point, largely in terms of what I am lacking.

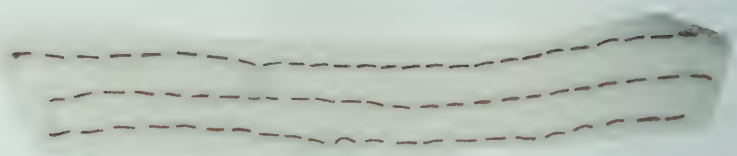
My mother starts to voice strong opinions about my clothing. "You need something red in your life," she insists, and for my twenty-first birthday, she buys me a three-tiered black dress saturated with gigantic red poppies. When I admit—after some pressing—that I do not like the print, my mom says with finality, "Well, I love it." The following Christmas, my mother gives me an enormous drab-colored flannel shirt and man-sized sweater, explaining that she is trying to match my "bag lady" aesthetic.

As part of her "Uninvited Collaborations with Nature," artist Nina Katchadourian started repairing broken spiderwebs using red thread:

> All of the patches were made by inserting segments one at a time directly into the web.... I fixed the holes in the web until it was fully repaired, or until it could no longer bear the weight of the thread. In the process, I often caused further damage when the tweezers got tangled in the web or when my hands brushed up against it by accident. The morning after the first patch job, I discovered a pile of red threads lying on the ground below the web. At first I assumed the wind had blown them out; on closer inspection it became clear that the spider had repaired the web to perfect condition using its own methods, throwing the threads out in the process. My repairs were always rejected by the spider and discarded, usually during the course of the night, even in webs which looked abandoned.[6]

Nina Katchadourian, *Mended Spiderweb #8 (Fish Patch)*, *Mended Spiderweb* series, 1998. Courtesy of the artist, Catharine Clark Gallery, and Pace Gallery.

Red is not my color.



The front of the card says: "For the One I Love: We may fight sometimes and have our little disagreements, but through it all there's one thing that will never change—." The inside says, "I'll always be right." Under the punchline, my mom wrote, "Your loving & non-controlling Mother!" She then added:

June 1990

Dear Meg,

Was looking for a card for Maureen (she passed the bar!) & found this, which was not to be passed up! It probably wasn't meant to be used for mother-daughter relationships but it sort of puts the whole irrational thing in a nutshell. . . . I hate to hear so much pain in your voice & not be able to fix it, but we both know that I can't. Even if I had fewer personal limitations, I still couldn't make it better. But you can & will, eventually.

I'm twenty-two years old, and I've just come home from dinner with some former roommates. Seized by the conviction that I wore the wrong clothes, I spend the next two hours trying on various outfits that I might have worn instead. If I had worn my maroon pants and paisley blouse, I conclude, I wouldn't have needed the hourly reassurance of looking at myself in the bathroom mirror.

Clothing alerts us to "our internal plurality," argue Warwick and Cavallaro. Choosing what to wear mirrors the "much more momentous task we undertake" as we try to encompass our "psychological and historical ambiguities."[7]

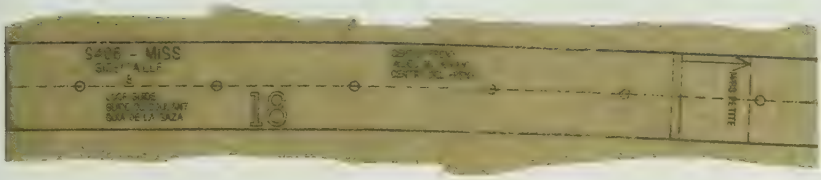
In October 1958, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* announced that Arthur Dimond "escorted not one, but two red-haired daughters to the altar." The brides, my mother and her sister, "wore identical princess line gowns of light ivory silk mist taffeta and Alençon lace."[8]

One of my sisters wore my mother's dress thirty years later, and I decide to wear it for my own wedding in 1993. Inhabiting history is appealing, but I feel tangled in my inheritance when I put on the dress.

On my wedding day, the tension between my mother and me erupts into a tearful argument about shoes. For my First Communion in second grade, my mom insisted that I wear patent leather buckle shoes instead of my wooden sandals. For my wedding, she insists that I wear her pumps instead of the lace-up 1940s-style shoes that I bought for the occasion.

The expression *tenir quelqu'un en lisière(s)* (to hold someone *en lisière*) means to limit her freedom and hold her in a state of dependence.

"Oh, Meg," my mom says in dismay, audibly sucking her teeth as I enter the church vestibule for a cousin's wedding. With intricate pleats, a double-layered collar, and a row of tiny wooden buttons, my dress is the most challenging garment I have ever sewn, but my mom finds it unsophisticated. A few months later, when I arrive for another cousin's wedding in a thrifted vintage dress, my mom pumps her first in the air and shouts, "Hooray!" Her approval seems to stem from the glamorous shape of the dress: a sleeveless sheath that dips low in the back.

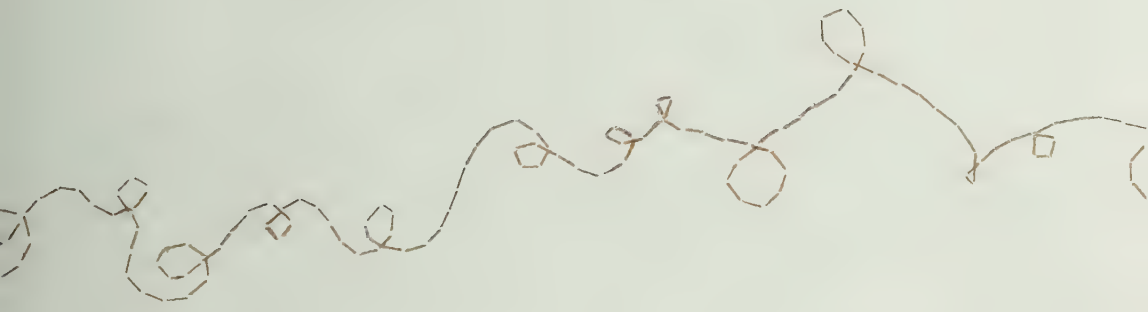


My mother and I are standing about fifty feet away from each other, repairing a fence that has partially fallen over in my sister's backyard. Out of the blue, and in a voice loud enough that I can hear her across the yard, my mom shares her suspicion that one of my siblings has been abused. "I've wondered if you were, too," she adds. Pliers in hand, I briefly explain what happened thirty years earlier. We finish repairing the fence and never speak of the matter again.[9]

Megan Sweney. *Mending Fences*. 2017

To unravel (as object) is to become fragile and helpless, to come apart at the seams, to shapeshift and threaten to disappear: a cloth reduced to a heap of threads.

To disentangle (as subject) is to release or extricate from snarls, to disengage or detach, to free. The single strand that emerges is supple and resilient, ready to fashion itself into an array of designs.



Later in my mother's life, watercolor painting seemed to capture her imagination as much as gardening. Her sketches and practice paintings include notes about color choices ("grey-green ferny," "very airy," "darker than sap"), technique ("fan brush pushed up," "interfacing for texture," "sponge"), observations about the scene she's depicting ("leaves turn up when drying," "purple brown in light"), and emphatic commentary for future reference ("*was* great!," "reworked a lot!," "closer!," "paper wouldn't cooperate!"). She painted everything from ginkgo leaves to bullfighters but frequently returned to the same subjects: a cherub statue from her garden, her youngest grandchild, the view from our lake house, and haunting figures who became the centerpiece of her painting titled *Faces of War*.[10]

Sally Sweeney, page from sketchbook, 1995.

Maternal Advice (Spoken)

Do you think he really wants to get married? I bet you're taking the relationship more seriously than he is. (when my husband and I decide to marry)

There's many a slip twixt the cup and the lip. (when my husband and I successfully bid on a house)

Oh, please! This doting is making me sick to my stomach! (when my husband's ankle is broken and I offer to bring him lunch)

Maternal Advice (Unspoken)

It's difficult to forge an independent identity.

Her own mother died at age thirty-seven, her half brother at thirty-nine, her father at fifty-three. Perhaps my mother never imagined that she would live to the age of seventy. For a time, grandchildren gave shape to her days. There were chalk drawings to make on the driveway, silly games to play in the basement, ice-skating rinks to create in the yard. But by the time she died, my mom seemed to have lost her footing. She was an "artist with no art form," a helium balloon no one could tether to the earth.[11] After her death, I found a letter she wrote to a friend (but never sent) in which she admitted needing alcohol to make it through the days.

Maternal Advice (Spoken)

Your kids will be seventeen before you know it! (when she is cajoling me to have children)

Isn't it about time for you to finish that dissertation? (when she is cajoling me to have children)

If it weren't for you kids, I'd be drinking under a bridge somewhere. (when she is cajoling me to have children)

In October 2004, two months after my mother has been diagnosed with advanced-stage lung cancer, I receive an olive branch: a package—with no note or explanation—containing my mom's favorite olive suede skirt and jacket and a homemade silk blouse that's an impressionist swirl of cream, gray, and peach. I reshape the skirt, resize the jacket, and add the blouse to my collection of fabrics awaiting reincarnation.

Maternal Advice (Unspoken)

Find a way to live with passion.

In December 2004, I attend my mother's funeral wearing a black skirt brightened with a few orange and red peonies. Three months later, while my father is hospitalized for alcohol withdrawal, I take two items from my mother's bureau: (1) her Irish wool cardigan with round leather buttons and two front patch pockets (stuffed with used tissues), and (2) a simple silver ring fashioned from a cuff link that belonged to my great-uncle. I can't envision my mom's hand—or my own—without this ring.

4

Time steadily unspools, leaving its trail of whispers. A leather kilt strap worn thin with age. A beloved handmade dress that no longer fits a growing girl's body. A crooked spine that gradually becomes straight. A young woman who impedes her body's maturation in a desperate bid to arrest time. A mother who struggles to view her child as an adult. A mother and daughter who run out of time to create a shared present. A woman who is claiming her present and future by sorting through remnants of the past—traces of loss, misshapen grace, and menders' tender ministrations.

My eclectic wardrobe includes garments that I've sewn myself, bargains from thrift stores, Edwardian blouses, beaded dresses from the '20s, diaphanous gowns from the '30s, tailored suits from the '40s, wiggle dresses from the '50s, patterned skirts from the '60s, one-of-a-kind creations from local designers, and contemporary haute couture. "Which outfit feels like 'me' today?" I ask as I decide what to wear, attending to the lines and shapes that garments create, the ways in which they make me feel elegant, playful, strong, or alive.

After earning tenure at my university, I buy a fancy sewing machine and take a sewing class that focuses on adapting patterns to fit individual bodies. I make a sleeveless sheath from olive wool embroidered with turquoise and ochre threads that extend like faint flames from the hem to the bust. For a jacket, I choose a lustrous bronze fabric with a thrilling backstory: it's actually constructed from mango-colored yarn sandwiched between layers of thin black gauze tacked together, inch by inch, with tiny stitches of gold thread. The finished jacket has an asymmetrical collar and asymmetrical hem, with a shorter side that overlaps a longer side and fastens with a vintage button.

When my edges begin to fray and the old fears of disappearance return, my contours come back into shape as I feel the drape of silk on my skin, trace the texture of brocade, absorb the exuberance of purple and mango or the peaceful depths of copper, slate, and dove. Experimenting with clothing, I slip out of the grooves and invent things as I go.

Buds—clenched fists—unfurl.
Tangles loosen, lungs expand—
The past is molten.

"One of the tragedies of death is that it interrupts a lifelong dialogue, rendering it a monologue," writes Edwidge Danticat.[12] But I hear my mother's voice in every memory and keepsake, every anecdote, newspaper column, and letter. And now, dialogue seems easier—possible—with ample time for quiet listening and no more need for hilarious sound bites. When I take an art class, my mother imbues every piece I create. Collages that feature her as gardener, painter, jazz lover, pilot, and life of the party. A bouquet of clothing strips that blossom from the sleeve of our wedding dress, inhabiting the intimate space that my mom and I shared as traces of our bodies commingled in the garment's threads. A meditation on Ellen Bass's "The Orange-and-White High-Heeled Shoes," a poem in which a daughter recalls how she and her mother slid into their shared pair of shoes

like girls diving into a cedar-tinged lake, like bees

entering the trumpet of a flower, like birds disappearing
into the green, green leaves of summer.[13]

Neither of us liked heels, but my mother and I both wore size seven. That lake, those flowers, the green summer leaves—in another life, they could have been ours.

Sally Sweeney, detail from sketchbook, 1995.

In quantum mechanics, entanglement describes particles that behave in tandem no matter how far apart they are; affecting one particle instantly affects the other, and information about one improves our knowledge of the other. Entanglement arises naturally, physicists explain, as in the aftermath of particle collisions.

Yes, long after our collisions, my mother and I are paired particles, separated by the galaxy between life and death yet linked by uncanny connections: our shared penchants for detail and documentation, our artistry, our skin-deep sense of a good fit. As I gain a fuller sense of her, of us, of me, it feels like falling in love again after a painful separation.

Detanglers call it the "Stash Disaster of Epic Proportion." In 2011, a California knitter inadvertently left her entire yarn collection outside during a rainstorm and then tried to salvage it in her dryer, producing a knotted mass "the size of a lamb." For months, detanglers gathered in public libraries and parks to undo the tangles. When they finally succeeded, the detanglers felt "ecstatic, but also sad." As one posted, "I am surprised by my sense of loss."[14]

The wall behind my sewing table displays a collection of artwork that I've gathered over the years. There is a joyful self-portrait, printed on cloth, made by a third grader who discovered her artistic talent while I was working with her at an arts center in rural Mississippi. There is a piece of linen—a gift from my sister-in-law—embroidered with a line from Proverbs: "She seeketh wool and flax, worketh willingly with her hands." There is an intricately patterned Scandinavian mitten resting on purple velvet; I knitted the mitten while my father-in-law was dying of cancer and could not summon the energy to make its mate. And there are three vintage prints from *Vogue*—thrift store finds—that feature elegant women from the 1920s, one of whom is perched on a peacock.

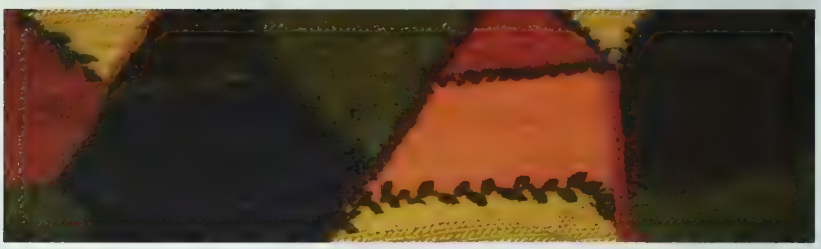
A pair of objects sits at the center of the collection: a plaque that I made as a child, with circles of glued-on spices and tiny pieces of pasta that say, "I love you Mom, 1978," and a color study that my mother made in her later years, with swatches of watercolor paint paired with labels such as "burnt sienna," "alizarin crimson," "viridian," and "Windsor green."

In these pieces, I see my mother's bequest. In the spice plaque: my elusive mother, who sparked my hunger for communication; in the color study: my mother the artist, who helped me discover the alchemy for converting need into passion.

Self-Portrait (Found Poetry from Mary Thomas's Dictionary of Embroidery Stitches)

Knotted chain stitch
Crown stitch, bonnet stitch
braid stitch
spine chain stitch
Paris stitch, French knot
interlaced insertion stitch, knotted insertion
stitch, twisted insertion stitch
spider's web, web stitch
captive rice stitch
battlement couching.

Border stitch, edging stitch
detached filling, oblique filling, mosaic filling
darning stitch, double darning stitch
surface darning
fancy stitch, spot stitch
perspective stitch.



Megan Sweeney, hand-knit sweater, 1997.

2

Salvage

[We] thought there was nothing
We couldn't alter, darn, or patch,
Somehow make right.
—Barbara Crooker, "Junior High,
Home Economics" (2014)

"You're the head of this family now," his mother told him when his father died, making my dad responsible, at age fifteen, for supporting his brother and six sisters. For the next seventy years, my dad yoked his sense of self, and self-worth, to his financial and professional success.

When I wrote his obituary, I followed my dad's wishes by including as many titles and accomplishments as space would allow.

But while he was living, I kept reaching for a fuller story about my father, trying to figure out the right arrangement of pieces, the stitch that would patch up my dad and reinforce our seam.

Lately, I've been thinking about the stories we tell when confronted with our inability to "alter, darn, or patch, / Somehow make right." How do we make sense of fragments that will never add up to a whole?

For the mythical Penelope, undoing her weaving was as "vital to the process of self-construction" as "the act of creation itself."[1] For artist Elana Herzog, deconstructing a carpet or bedspread represents loss, but matter and energy are conserved, and all that existed before is still accounted for.[2] For me, unstitching renders loss material, mobile, open to re-visioning and rearrangement.

Elana Herzog, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, installation view, Herbert F. Johnson Museum, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 2005. Used by permission of the artist.

Mr. Sweeney earned his B.S. from Duquesne University in 1957 and his L.L.B. from Duquesne University in 1962. ~~He was admitted to the Bar of Pennsylvania in 1962 and the Bar of the U.S. Supreme Court in 1968~~. During his career as a renowned lawyer and business executive, Mr. Sweeney was an absent partner ~~at the law firm of Buchanan, Ingersoll, Rodewald, Kyle and Buerger (1962–78); senior vice president of Allegheny Ludlum Industries, Inc. (1978–81); executive vice president and chief administrative officer of Allegheny International, Inc. (1981–84); vice chairman of Allegheny International, Inc. (1984–85); partner, managing director, and board member of Dickie, McCamey & Chilcote (1986–98); president of Sweeney Metz Fox McGrann & Schermer (1998–2000); and partner at Schnader Harrison Segal & Lewis, LLP, Pittsburgh (2000–2012).~~ who relied on his wife to care for their six children and four foster children.

Mr. Sweeney's distinguished professional career was matched by his equally distinguished record of community service. He generously served ~~as chairman of the board of directors at Seton Hill College, St. Francis Medical Center, and DePaul Institute, and he served~~ as a member of the board of directors for numerous organizations, leaving him little time to be a member of his family.

During the first decade of my parents' marriage, my mom chronicled my dad's career in a scrapbook, circling and underlining his name every time it appeared in a letter or newspaper clipping. She clipped coverage of the National Moot Court Competition that my dad won in 1961 and several articles about his efforts to secure public bus transportation and state funding for students in Catholic schools. Amid these clippings is a thank-you note from a client who gave my dad, as payment, a hand-made hook rug called "Fantasy of Colors." The rug hung on the wall of our television room throughout my childhood.

"I am painfully aware of the fact that you interrupted your vacation to do this job for us," the auxiliary bishop wrote my dad in 1966. "I do hope that your vacation was not ruined and that you have an opportunity to rest up before coming back to the grinding life of the big city."

The final document in my mom's scrapbook is a four-page, typed, single-spaced letter written on July 8, 1968. My dad is refusing to pay $105.00 per day for my mom's four-day stay at St. Francis Hospital. His tone is breathless, self-righteous, slightly unhinged. "Any charitable institution which would attempt to gouge the poor public to that extent ought to consider giving up its charitable status and go into the business of gouging the public for profit," he fumes. "God help the poor people who can't afford to pay. It is on their behalf that I feel compelled to write and ask you to review your room charges in light of the objectives of your institution. Debtors' prisons went out of existence in Europe long ago and never were tolerated in this country and yet St. Francis, which calls itself a charitable institution, sets up a procedure which holds the patient captive until the patient's family has made arrangements to repurchase that family member." After suggesting that $65.00 per day would be a reasonable amount to pay, my dad continues, "I am very tempted not to pay any amount and to make an issue of the entire matter so that

poor people who don't know any better and who are too afraid and too humiliated to question your high-class administrative personnel will be protected in the future."

Midway through the letter, the source of my dad's pain and frustration—a stillborn child—pokes through like a fang. "Had my wife given birth to a child during her stay I might well have paid the bill. However, she did not and left the hospital without any surgical procedures whatever."

From the time I was two, my family almost always had one or more long-term houseguests. There were four foster brothers, one of whom ripped out a patch of my sister's hair; foreign exchange students, including a young woman who did little more than watch soap operas and eat cinnamon toast; a cousin; my mom's coworker; even an unemployed love interest of one of my sisters. Outsiders considered my family exceptionally generous.

He was admitted to the Bar of Pennsylvania in 1962 and the Bar of the U.S. Supreme Court in 1968. He was also admitted to many other bars during his career—so many, in fact, that his wife told him she would leave him unless he did his drinking at home so that he could at least see his children.

It's early on a Saturday afternoon, and I'm sitting on my dad's lap, facing his belly. With my index fingers, I trace the purple and red lines that spread like a web over his nose and cheeks, trying my best not to break the connection between my fingertips and his face. Like an explorer searching for buried treasure, I want to follow the colorful paths as far as they'll take me before my dad disappears again as day turns into night.

Every weekday morning, my dad descends the stairs from my parents' bedroom, nods his head and clicks his heels, swallows one aspirin with a glass of milk and another with a glass of V8 juice, and heads off to work. When he returns from work twelve to fourteen hours later, my dad goes to the television room, installs himself in his leather armchair, and begins his nightly ritual of drinking several six-packs of Iron City Beer.

As a testament to his many accomplishments, Mr. Sweeney was named a Distinguished Alumnus of the School of Law at Duquesne University, and he was named one of the 100 Most Distinguished Living Alumni by the Duquesne University Century Club.

Journal Entry, 1/22/1978

Daddy came home from his 10 day trip to London. He brought home so many wonderful things! Just like mommy said when we asked why he kept calling, Daddy does care about us. He does miss us. He dictated into a recorder a long story on what he did and saw. Michelle will type a copy for each of us. Daddy gets to go back in February and he wants Mommy to go along. She doesn't think she's going to go, and I know why. Daddy got her a cameo. I'm still a little bitter but I feel much love for Daddy. This is for Daddy: I LOVE YOU. Thank you God, for my daddy.

I am named after the daughter of my dad's hero, the Catholic lawyer St. Thomas More. During his first trip to London, my dad bought me a book from the National Portrait Gallery, *"The King's Good Servant": Sir Thomas More, 1477/8–1535*, and two pamphlets about the church where Sir Thomas More and his family worshipped, *The Treasures of Time: Embroidered Kneelers in Chelsea Old Church* and *Chelsea Old Church: Bombing and Rebuilding, 1941–1950*. When I flip through these books now, I'm struck by my father's identification with his hero. As a ten-year-old, I treasured the books as proof: I existed as a distinct entity in my dad's mind.

My memories of my father are large-scale: special occasions (vacation outings), dramatic episodes (a late-night car crash), spectacular gifts (an inversion table that allowed us to hang upside down). But these memories are dwarfed—in number and intensity—by my everyday memories of my mother.

I gave him a letter at the start of my junior year of college, just before I left for France. I needed to convey my sense of loss, the heartbreak of watching him disappear into the bottle. *I love you*, I explained. *I want you to be present in my life.* It was the first of many letters I wrote to my dad but the only one that seemed to make a difference; I wasn't there to experience it, but my father briefly stopped drinking while I was abroad.

In the nineteenth century, rag-and-bone men salvaged rags to make cardboard and bones to make tools. Their hopeful efforts inspire me as I sift through remnants, searching for value amid debris, for salvageable bits and shards.

Born in Pittsburgh, PA on October 20, 1931, Clayton A. Sweeney was the son of Denis Regis and Grace Frances (Roche) Sweeney. Mr. Sweeney inherited his mother's penchant for playfulness, puns, and pranks.

I hardly remember my Gaga; I didn't know her well, and she died when I was in fifth grade. But in the scrapbook that she made as a young woman, Grace Frances Roche reminds me of my dad—and stories about my dad—in his younger years. Next to photos of herself at Pansy Farm, Grace writes, "How Graceful!" and "A Roche among the rhubarb." The scrapbook also includes a mock job application that Grace wrote when seeking employment as a public school teacher.

The final lines of her application read:

> Of experience I've had two years.
> The directors part with me in tears.
> They always beg me to return.
> Parents and pupils for me yearn.
> On my success I shall not dwell.
> Anyone can easily tell
> that I'm a girl to be admired—
> the kind that is not ever fired.
> My character—'tis above reproach!!!
> Just send the contract to GRACE FRANCES ROCHE.

One year, my dad suspends my brother's Easter basket inside the basketball hoop, and it takes hours for my brother to find it. When my brother asks for a rabbit for Christmas, my dad buys him a beagle instead, but he puts paper rabbit ears on the dog and writes a funny poem explaining that the dog is really a rabbit.

The year when my dad buys a double bass for my mom, he devises an elaborate scheme to trick her into thinking that he has bought another dog. He "mistakenly" leaves a dog leash on the laundry room table, and on Christmas morning, he gives my mom a T-shirt that says, "I [heart] beagles." When he carries in a blanket-wrapped, life-size statue of a beagle, my mom looks stricken. But when she realizes the joke and my dad gives her the bass, my mom whoops with surprise and delight.

"LET'S BREAK PAPA'S RULES!" my nieces and nephews shout at the top of their lungs, determined to flout every decree my dad has posted in the kitchen, including "No having fun," "No laughing," and "No eating ice cream." In photo after photo, squealing grandchildren surround Papa as he dumps a bucket of water on his head, allows himself to be bombarded with snowballs, or disappears under an enormous pile of leaves. As these grandchildren get older, however, Papa seems less and less comfortable with them, as if they might want more than his antics.

Flipping through Gaga's scrapbook, I wonder about another dimension of my father's inheritance. The scrapbook opens with several newspaper clippings about Grace's favorite brother, John C. Roche, who was killed in action in 1918. One headline reads, "Member of Company C, Who Saw Service on the Mexican Border, Finally a Victim of the Huns in France."

Next to these clippings, Grace includes a poem called "Brothers," which ends with a line about God giving "A hero's grave / To one who didn't come home." Other clippings mention Grace's brother Clayton Daniel Roche, who was severely wounded in action, and her brother James H. Roche, whose sudden death was announced with the headline "Apoplexy Caused a Sudden Ending of a Well Known Citizen's Life." Juxtaposed with photos of young women and soldiers picnicking at Linger Longer Cottage in 1917, these newspaper clippings make me wonder how Grace experienced men's failure to linger longer in her life. Did the weight of her loss compound the weight that my dad must have felt when she charged him with supporting the family?

Two images of my dad stand side-by-side in my mind: a young man holding a tiki mug and wearing a headband, his bare chest adorned with a peace medallion the size of a tennis ball, and an older man who snatched a dime-sized peace pin off my coat, muttering his disapproval, as we were heading to church one Christmas Eve when I was home from college.

In 1985, my dad delivers the commencement address for the Kogod College of Business Administration at American University. He begins his address with a tongue-in-cheek story about the advice my older siblings gave him when he asked what he should say in his speech. "The first suggestion I got," he explains, "was that I not show up. The second suggestion was that I avoid, at all costs, telling jokes since 'all of your jokes are old and very few are funny.' The third suggestion was that I talk for

not more than five minutes and without reference to my own humble beginnings. As I left the room, further suggestions were being made but my bruised ego could handle no more."

The heart of my dad's speech, titled "The Meaning of Success," is his portrait of Sylvester Wagner, father of his best friend and owner of a Pittsburgh shoe store. My dad's message for the graduates is that Sylvester Wagner is the most successful man he has ever known because Sylvester "was at peace with himself, at peace with his family and at peace with his God."

"That's an expensive piece," Dad occasionally interjects, hovering in the doorway as my sisters, brother, nieces, and I take turns choosing items from my mother's jewelry box. My siblings and I talk over one another as we're flooded with memories of my mom: "Remember when she used to wear those earrings?" "They're so '70s!" "That was her 'bridge club' necklace!" "I made that pin for her at camp!" On my first few turns, I choose my mom's everyday hoop earrings and a charm bracelet that she wore for special occasions. But as the process continues, my dad's obsession with monetary value and my mom's penchant for the absurd battle for dominance in the room, and I find myself choosing impossibly garish items: a gold filigree turtle pin with protruding garnet eyes and a fake diamond-encrusted green frog pin that's missing a leg.

In his later years, my dad wants me to buy myself clothing for Christmas and my birthday and then tell him how much he owes me. I sidestep this gifting because it feels like bank transactions.

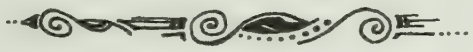
As a Father's Day gift, my brother takes photographs of himself and asks my dad to choose his favorite. In number 1, he's hiding naked in a bush, his head peeking out from the leaves; number 2: he's sitting cross-legged on a bench, flaunting short shorts and tall boots; number 3: he's sitting at a desk, his waist-length hair cascading around his shoulders as he rests his chin on a huge pile of papers, books, and trash. My dad definitely doesn't like the cascading hair or the disorderly desk, but number 3 comes closest to a world he can recognize. He finally lets me hang my brother's photo—after repeated nudging—in a corner hidden by a lamp.

Our relationship was a one-handed clap. I pieced together portraits of my dad in cloth and words, as if to say, "I see you. Do you see me seeing you?" Perhaps I thought my many poems—heartfelt, sometimes humorous—would register better than ordinary language, persuading my dad to join me in the place I had reserved for him:

Excerpt, "A Birthday Ode," 10/20/1989

Clayton A. grew up right quick
(And so his ears did, too).
He worked his way from grade school
All the way to Duquesne U.
Seeking justice through the law
Was the highest of his goals
Even though his daily focus
Was on selling toilet bowls.

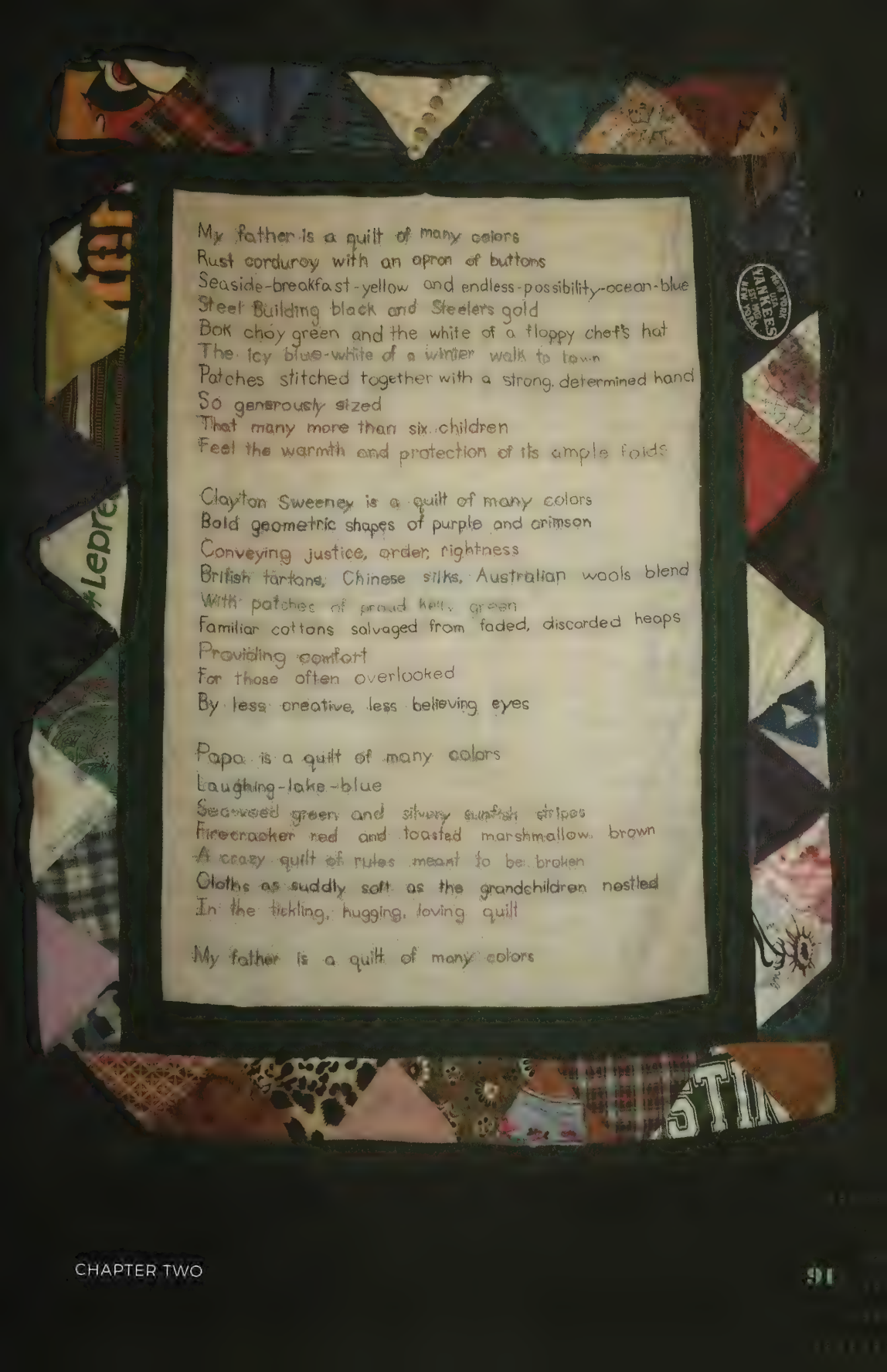
After my dad's death, I found some of my letters and poems in his bureau drawer, like unanswered invitations in a dead letter file.



Before my dad's seventieth birthday, my family members sent me the following:

- Spiderman and leprechaun underwear
- a leopard-print bathing suit
- a hot-pink tutu
- my dad's boxer shorts and a few of his old ties
- pajamas
- a Yankees baseball cap
- threadbare T-shirts
- a "Terrible Towel" from the Steelers
- embroidered jeans
- a Mickey Mouse sweatshirt
- Liberty of London cotton
- flannel shirts
- a swatch from my mother's wedding dress.

I cut all of these fabrics into small triangles and then stitched them together to form a border for a poem that I embroidered on an old piece of linen. With the conjoined triangles serving as proof of our interwoven lives, the poem creates a patchwork of plenty from my dad's disparate roles as father, professional, and grandfather. "My father is a quilt of many colors."



My father is a quilt of many colors
Rust corduroy with an apron of buttons
Seaside-breakfast-yellow and endless-possibility-ocean-blue
Steel Building black and Steelers gold
Bok choy green and the white of a floppy chef's hat
The icy blue-white of a winter walk to town
Patches stitched together with a strong, determined hand
So generously sized
That many more than six children
Feel the warmth and protection of its ample folds

Clayton Sweeney is a quilt of many colors
Bold geometric shapes of purple and crimson
Conveying justice, order, rightness
British tartans, Chinese silks, Australian wools blend
With patches of proud Kelly green
Familiar cottons salvaged from faded, discarded heaps
Providing comfort
For those often overlooked
By less creative, less believing eyes

Papa is a quilt of many colors
Laughing-lake-blue
Seaweed green and silvery sunfish stripes
Firecracker red and toasted marshmallow brown
A crazy quilt of rules meant to be broken
Cloths as cuddly soft as the grandchildren nestled
In the tickling, hugging, loving quilt

My father is a quilt of many colors

During his career as a renowned lawyer and business executive, Mr. Sweeney was ~~a partner at the law firm of Buchanan, Ingersoll, Rodewald, Kyle and Buerger (1962–78); senior vice president of Allegheny Ludlum Industries, Inc. (1978–81); executive vice president and chief administrative officer of Allegheny International, Inc. (1981–84); vice chairman of Allegheny International, Inc. (1984–85); partner, managing director, and board member of Dickie, McCamey & Chilcote (1986–98);~~ president of Sweeney Metz Fox McGrann & Schermer (1998–2000). ~~; and partner at Schnader Harrison Segal & Lewis, LLP, Pittsburgh (2000–2012).~~ This law firm disbanded only two years after Mr. Sweeney created it. As his wife later shared with some of her children, Mr. Sweeney's colleagues concluded that his heavy drinking was negatively affecting his work.

He couldn't feed himself. He was spilling orange juice on his tie and couldn't get the eggs onto his fork, let alone into his mouth. "Just relax," my mom said. "Take a deep breath." As if it had anything to do with relaxing. As if the combined force of their denial could hide the real problem. As if my mom's vessel of choice—a paper cup—could blind us to the new normal: *if you can't beat 'em, join 'em.* We were eating breakfast at the fire hall during my weekend visit, and my dad's hands were shaking so badly that the lapel of his suit coat was soiled with scrambled eggs.

Three months after my mother died, my father was hospitalized for a bleeding ulcer. During his hospitalization, he inadvertently went into a monthlong process of alcohol withdrawal. My siblings and I had heated disagreements about how to respond, but when my dad finally regained consciousness, he preempted all suggestions by announcing, "I have a plan." The "plan" consisted solely of being fiercely independent: proving that he could be sober without anyone's help. Seriously doubtful but hopeful that the plan would work, I taught my final classes of the term and went to stay with my father for two weeks when he was released from the hospital. I bought him groceries and made him food, took walks with him, gathered books and movies for him, shared my ideas and anecdotes, and asked him questions. Like Scheherazade, I wanted to enthrall my dad with stories, keep him interested in the world, prevent him from slipping away again.

~~In his leisure time~~ During the brief, wonderful period of his sobriety, Mr. Sweeney was an avid cyclist, choir member, Steelers fan, and maker of silly rules for his grandchildren to break. Most of all, he loved spending time with family and friends in the Lake Chautauqua region. Mr. Sweeney's love and generosity were deep and wide, and he ~~will remain~~ seemed remarkably present ~~through~~ in the many lives that he touched. ~~In lieu of flowers, please send donations in honor of Clayton A. Sweeney to one of the following five~~ During this time, he was also involved with the ~~organizations:~~ American Red Cross of Southwestern New York, Emmaus Community of Pittsburgh, The Robert H. Jackson Center, and Advocates for Survivors of Torture and Trauma, ~~or The Retreat Residential Recovery Program (www.theretreat.org).~~

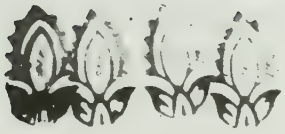
Megan Sweeney,
Photo Collage for Dad #2, 2012.

"Does anyone want a Klondike?" my dad asks. My husband and I look at each other in disbelief: it's midnight, and my dad is not only awake but attentive, funny, exuberant. We spend the weekend taking walks in the woods and chattering hopefully about the prospect of Obama winning the election. My dad makes friends at his church, joins the choir, does fifteen-mile bike rides to raise money for the Red Cross, fills the house with flowers, reads poetry, and eats ice cream piled high with whipped cream. When I'm scheduled to give an important talk, he comes to stay with me for a few days, offers feedback while I practice in the room beforehand, and weeps with pride as I deliver my talk. Like my mom's favorite cactus, the night-blooming cereus—which lies dormant all year then bursts into flower for one exquisitely scented night—my dad has made a sudden appearance in my life, and I want to savor every minute of his presence.

Sally Sweeney, page from sketchbook, 1992.

~~In his leisure time,~~ As he resumed his heavy drinking, Mr. Sweeney was an ~~avid~~ obsessive cyclist and calorie counter, ~~choir member, Steelers fan, and maker of silly rules for his grandchildren to break. Most of all,~~ and he no longer loved spending time with family and friends in the Lake Chautauqua region. Mr. Sweeney's ~~love and generosity~~ lack of well-being ~~were~~ was deep and wide. ~~, and he will remain present through the many lives that he touched. In lieu of flowers, please send donations in honor of Clayton A. Sweeney to one of the following five organizations: American Red Cross of Southwestern New York, Emmaus Community of Pittsburgh, The Robert H. Jackson Center, Advocates for Survivors of Torture and Trauma, or~~ It could have been so helpful for him and for those who loved him if he had checked himself into The Retreat Residential Recovery Program (www.theretreat.org).

She's his girlfriend, we joke. He's her sugar daddy. My dad seems to be irked by her periodic mentions of boyfriends and marriage, but otherwise, his thirty-year-old personal trainer can do no wrong. None of us has ever met her—he keeps her away from us—but we definitely feel her presence. He leaves family gatherings to attend workout sessions with her. She and her mother clean my dad's house while we're not there, rearranging things and putting them in places where we can't find them, throwing things away without consulting us, making pointless displays of knickknacks that have been hidden in dusty corners for years. We start to think of her as the "good" daughter, the convenient substitute who doesn't have real needs, problems, or desires. My dad's obsession with her is matched by his obsession with his caloric intake, rapidly diminishing weight, and body mass index. Every phone call includes repeated discussion of his BMI. I recognize the impulse: he is fighting, fighting, fighting for control and seems to be vanishing, once again, before our eyes.



It starts happening during every visit. After a full day of cooking, we're finally ready to sit down and enjoy time with the whole family when Dad makes his exit. Sometimes, he simply announces that he's going out to dinner. Other times, his exit is far more dramatic. Just after we gather at the table, my dad starts shaking uncontrollably, says he's so cold that he can't get warm, and asks to be taken to bed. The first few times are heartbreaking and highly distressing, but the routine becomes familiar. Whether it's alcohol withdrawal, a psychosomatic response, and/or a dramatic plea for attention, the result is always the same: my dad exits stage left, leaving his children and grandchildren behind. When it happens for the second Thanksgiving in a row, the grandkids watch in silence. Later that night as the Steelers game is about to begin, my dad quietly slips into the television room, wearing his nightgown. My husband dubs him the Ghost of Christmas Past.

It's New Year's Eve, and all the kids and adults in my family are having a dance party. We take turns choosing songs from the *Just Dance* videos and do our best to imitate the avatar dancers' complicated moves. While we're laughing, breathlessly dancing, and singing along with goofy songs such as "The Wild, Wild West" and "Ra-Ra-Rasputin, Lover of the Russian Queen," my dad is sitting in a chair at the edge of the dance floor, poring over the details of his last will and testament.

I need visible proof to counteract my father's attempts to shut out the many people who love him. For Christmas in 2012, I make my dad three large, framed collages of photographs. The first features his parents and in-laws, my mom, my siblings, and me. The second and third feature his children, sons-in-law, grandchildren, siblings, nieces and nephews, and friends. These photo patchworks stand sentinel over my father's history, defying his systematic efforts to efface the powerful networks that have sustained him for the past eighty years. "Don't you see?" I want to say to my dad. "We exist and we love you, and you exist in relation to all of us."

Megan Sweeney, *Photo Collage for Dad #1*, 2012.

Born in Pittsburgh, PA on October 20, 1931, Clayton A. Sweeney ~~was the son of Denis Regis and Grace Frances (Roche) Sweeney, and the brother of Marguerite Clohisy, Rosemary Flynn, Marygrace Stafford, Lorraine Wagner, and the late Cathreen Sweeney, Cecile Donoghue, and Denis Sweeney.~~ died on January 27, 2014.

According to the priest and dedicated friends who tried to comfort him, my dad was not at peace with himself, his family, or his God during the days and nights leading up to his colostomy, a procedure that he feared his body could not withstand. In his addled, drunken state, he kept repeating that he had been a bad father and worried that God would not welcome him after his death.

Three of us spent the night by my dad's side, reassuring him that it was okay—it was time—to let go. Still trying to piece together a fuller picture, I asked my sisters, "What was Dad like when you were little? What do you remember about him from the years that you spent at home?" Our memories evoked different eras of my father's life, but together, they created a portrait of a man who hovered out of reach for those who loved him.

As my dad's hold on life became more tenuous, we alternated between tears and gallows humor. Knowing how much he hated to be late, we started telling my dad that the bar in heaven opens at 9:00 a.m. He took his last breath at 8:58.

Official cause of death: cirrhosis. Immediate cause of death: a festering, burst-open wound from his colostomy. No amount of suturing could help his body to mend.

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www.theretreat.org).

I grieved so much for my dad while he was living that his death felt like a cessation of loss.

The funeral director has assembled my siblings and me to share stories about my dad for a feature article that he plans to write. We furtively glance at each other, wondering where the grenades are planted, steeling ourselves for the impending explosions. My sister who does disaster relief for the Red Cross—Katrina, the Boston Marathon, Pulse Nightclub—steps up as spokesperson. Her statements ring hollow, but she's able to summon words, which I am not, and she shepherds us safely to the end of the hour.

The wake serves as a temporary balm, a salve that helps to soothe the pain and shame of my father's death. With every story of his wise and patient counsel, his humor, or his deep involvement with one community organization after another, the fullness of my dad's life comes back into focus. I'm reminded of the work he did, over several decades, to make St. Francis Medical Center a thriving community hospital that provides high-quality care for low-income people. Members of the Seton Hill College community tell me about the myriad ways in which my dad supported the college, including inviting groups of students to dinner or to our lake house for the weekend so that he could listen to their suggestions. I hear stories from those who biked alongside my dad, when he was in his seventies, in fundraisers for the American Red Cross, and stories from those who benefited from his decades-long commitment to the Emmaus Community, which provides housing and care for people with intellectual disabilities. And for the first time, I hear of my dad's involvement with educational programs at the Robert H. Jackson Center, named after a Supreme Court justice and prosecutor at the Nuremberg Trials. When I meet a trusted colleague who reached out to my dad a few times when he seemed to need a friend, I'm overwhelmed by this man's love for my father and can express my gratitude only through tears.

In his funeral homily, my brother-in-law comforts us with this thought: my dad can finally let go of his "fear that who he was would not be good enough"; now he will know that he "was always enough." After the funeral, I read this homily over and over, taking solace from its language of plenty.

> For need can blossom into all the compensations it requires.
> —MARILYNNE ROBINSON, *Housekeeping* (1980)

But as time passes, I find myself pausing over the word *enough*. If my dad was always enough (good enough, despite all his doubts), does that mean that our relationship was enough? Can recognizing his fullness undo my lifelong sense of loss? What happens, with the art of piecing, when the pieces are simply too scarce, when no amount of ingenuity or reordering can make them coalesce into something like a whole? If artistic transformation conserves matter and energy, what does transformation look like if there was never a whole that could be put back together, if lack was a fundamental feature of the economy?

He is hailing a taxi on the Champs-Élysées in Paris, touring a factory in Japan or Britain or Germany, standing arm in arm with dignitaries before the Great Wall of China. He is delivering a speech at a podium, conversing with executives in lavish boardrooms, attending a formal dinner (in a white tuxedo!). He is throwing out the first ball at a Pirates baseball game. He is posing with a local news anchor as both hold special needs children on their laps. I search for traces of meaning in these photographs, but they yield nothing. I could transpose my dad's stiff smile from one scene to another.

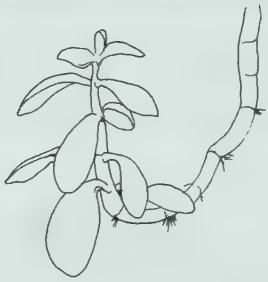
Stains in clothing resist "the living body's ultimate erasure," writes Catherine Harper.[3] This idea tempers my sadness as I think of the soiled, food-encrusted suits that my dad wore in his final years. I keep one piece of his clothing after his death: a gorgeous paisley shirt from my husband and me, made from velvety corduroy in rich hues of brown, camel, black, red, and dark green. My dad loved the shirt. I sometimes wear it around my house, engulfed in his cologne.

It's an empty cicada shell. The hull of a beached ship. Rows of exposed joists stand in the bookshelves' stead, once home to my dad's biographies and books about Pittsburgh, my mom's Robert Ludlum and Ken Follett novels, board games, tchotchkes, and thirty-five years of New Year's Eve regalia. In some ways, seeing the new owners' renovations of our lake house feels cathartic, like exorcising years of neglect: the basement's moldy carpets, the broken-tiled bathroom that my dad used when staggering to bed. But they uprooted fifty-seven trees and bushes—leaving few traces of my mom's green thumb—and the oak branch with the wooden swing is now a phantom limb.

Yet, in quiet moments, as I read the William Butler Yeats poem that I gave my dad decades before, I think of the lake house when "midnight's all a glimmer" and lake water is "lapping with low sounds by the shore." Hearing my father's voice ("I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree"), I imagine his ashes nourishing the soil where my mother's garden beds lay, as peace "comes dropping slow. . . ."[4]

> You can add up the parts; you won't have the sum.
> —LEONARD COHEN, "Anthem" (1992)

If it's true that "need can blossom into all the compensations it requires," maybe this kind of compensation is not a quid pro quo restitution for loss or injury. Balance sheets are ill suited for reckoning with human relationships. Perhaps, instead, it's like the bodily adjustments we make—sometimes deliberately, sometimes unconsciously—to maintain balance, to keep moving when some of our muscles or joints aren't functioning as well as they should. Compensations, in this sense, are verdant offshoots from barren limbs.



Tannaz Motevalli, *Offshoot*, 2017. This jade plant has been in the Sweeney family for seventy-five years. Used by permission of the artist.

Perhaps mending is not an effort to eradicate loss or achieve an elusive wholeness but an attentiveness to the past, a commitment to salvage meaning from history. Maybe it's more about gathering than repair, a process of encompassing fragments and empty spaces filled with longing, an arms-wide-open embrace of the holes, threadbare patches, unassimilable scraps, and visible seams that contribute to the design. As a meditative, aesthetic practice, mending offers a means to prevent the past from becoming a black hole that wrenches everything into its singularity. With pencil and needle in hand, the crush of gravity and fear of annihilation give way to breath, movement, reimagination.

Redress

A necessary feature of transmission . . . is that it can go astray: the letter does not arrive, the wrong person inherits, the legacy is an unwanted burden. Yet even in the wildest of transmissions, something always does arrive at its destination.
—Peter Stallybrass, "Worn Worlds" (2012)

Loss is only knowable through a proximity to beauty.
—Jennifer Nash, "Writing Black Beauty" (2019)

My favorites are no longer the striped stocking caps or captain's hats I wore at age four, but wearing a hat still puts a kick in my step. Perched on glass shelves inside a small case in my bedroom, my cloches and cocktail hats remind me of my earliest plumage.

From those hat-sporting days of navigating family chaos to my college-age efforts to reconnect with my body, clothing and I go way back. Now, decades after these periods of crisis, I'm trying to understand what keeps us so attached.

To dress:

> to make straight; to put into proper alignment; to arrange; to prepare for use or service; to tend or cultivate; to apply protective or therapeutic covering, as for a wound; to put through a finishing process by smoothing the surface. From Anglo-French *drescer, dresser*: to direct, put right.[1]

Fascinated by the connection between avian and human adornment, particularly of the head, Charles Darwin claimed that birds and humans have "nearly the same taste for the beautiful," as shown by "our women, both civilised and savage, decking their heads with borrowed plumes, and using gems which are hardly more brilliantly coloured than the naked skin and wattles of certain birds."[2]

Darwin failed to note that men also have a history of "decking their heads," but he couldn't stop thinking about a male bird known for its adornment: the peacock. Finding it implausible that peacocks' cumbersome tails could help them escape predators or navigate their environment, Darwin correctly hypothesized that their tails became more dramatic over time because potential mates preferred colorful males; peacocks acquired elaborate adornments to capture the attention of elusive females.

Though Hindus consider Indian peacocks sacred due to the "eyes of the gods" on their resplendent tail feathers, the ocelli are more about being seen than seeing. When choosing potential mates, female peahens consider the quality of male peacocks' feather trains, including their length, number of ocelli, and symmetry of patterning. In the average lek, peahens choose to mate with only about five percent of the males, so peacocks pull out all the stops as they unfurl their six-foot-wide fans.[3] Crystal-like structures in their feathers reflect different wavelengths of light depending on how they're spaced, creating an array of shimmering colors. And peacocks shake different parts of their feathers as they strut, emitting various low-frequency sounds designed to entice peahens at a range of distances.

Peacocks' plumage ultimately inspired Darwin's theory of sexual selection, which posits that beautiful yet otherwise useless adornment can evolve when it provides an advantage in the competition for mates.

A group of peacocks is called an ostentation. Derived from the Latin word for "display," *ostentation* also means "vain and unnecessary show, especially for the purpose of attracting attention, admiration, or envy."[4]

Unlike their iridescent partners, Indian peahens have mottled brown, gray, and green plumage. Their understated garb allows them to see without being seen, to blend in with the bushes and remain safe from predators while incubating eggs.

On one hand, I share peahens' inclination to remain safe, to watch, to blend in with the bushes.

On the other hand, I envy their flamboyant partners' metallic blue crests perched on their heads like the fascinators British women wear to royal weddings.

As a hat-obsessed child, I wasn't trying to attract a mate, but I, too, wanted to capture the attention of an elusive female. Does my early plumage suggest that my ongoing love of hats and clothing stems from a vestigial need to be seen? Is it possible to be a peahen in peacock garb—adorned in shimmering feathers yet drawn to watching and listening rather than seeking center stage?

During the summer, wearing the same clothes provides the comfort of familiarity, like baking the same pie every Thanksgiving. During the school year, though, I love the creative challenge of coming up with various outfits that feel like me and suit the day's needs. When I need a boost of inspiration or confidence, I might wear my Chinese jacket inherited from a friend, made of silver taffeta embroidered with burgundy velvet chrysanthemums. When I feel footloose and playful, I'll go with my purple cocktail hat, purple cigarette pants, and a vintage wool jacket embroidered with purple, slate, and gray paisleys and vines. For a difficult administrative challenge? A vintage leather jacket with a chunky, diagonal zipper. For maximum coziness, a hand-knit sweater dress that could double as a sleeping bag.

Clothing is our interface with the world, fashion theorists emphasize, a boundary between self and other, a surface where separate entities meet and interact. For me, though, dressing evokes interfacing as a sewing term: the invisible layer in a garment that supports and shapes a collar, cuff, or lapel. Others see my outfit but can't see what matters most: the way dressing defines and redefines my edges, the reinforcement I feel from choosing and inhabiting my clothes.

One Thanksgiving, I forgot to put my packed suitcase in the car and arrived at my family's lake house with only the clothes on my back. Forgetting my suitcase didn't really matter, though, because packing is ultimately about gathering my pieces, shoring up my outline, reassuring myself that I won't be unhomed. My year in Paris lingers in muscle memory: the fear, the cold, the hunger. Then, I had no map of myself and couldn't find my way home. But now, packing reminds me of my internal compass, my knack for finding home wherever I am.

I love wearing whatever feels right to me, regardless of the occasion. I may end up at Home Depot wearing a pillbox hat and 1940s suit, as I did one Christmas when my sartorial plans didn't match my family's agenda, but my goal is to dress so that I'm in tune with myself. If my body/skin/second skin harmony feels elusive, I might keep a backup outfit on standby as emotional insurance, a toolkit for getting back on my axis.

After my disappearing act in college, my clothes taught me how it feels to claim space. As I draped myself in texture and color, diffuse molecules coalesced, solidifying my spectral self.

Clothing allows for infinite expression but provides borders and limits, something to push against. It reminds me that I live in this body, with these emotions, on this day, with this temperature and quality of light.

What's tricky is when my clothing choices seem noteworthy to others in ways I don't anticipate. Recently, a stranger stopped me in the grocery store to tell me that she was auditing a course in a classroom near mine and would watch for my arrival every day so she could see my outfits. For ten minutes, this woman and I stood in the produce section discussing my clothes. This kind of attention sometimes makes me hesitate to wear a cloche and beaded 1920s dress for a day of teaching or an Edwardian blouse for a trip to the dentist. One year, when I wore a black, rose-adorned, turn-of-the-century dress for a holiday party, I felt trapped in the spotlight and alienated from myself, as if my clothes were absurd and unseemly, proof of an indiscreet hunger or clownish craving. "Next time," I thought, "I should just wear jeans."

"I saw you from afar," my colleague gushes, "and I wondered, 'Who is wearing that perfect outfit?' You look like you stepped off a movie set!" I thank her for the compliment but cringe that our conversation is once again focused on my clothes. A week later, when I see this colleague walking toward me, I immediately reverse course and slip into the nearest side street. Overcome with shame, I can't bear the thought of her seeing me wearing the same outfit.

Years afterward, I'm ashamed of this shame even as I try to understand it. For peacocks, scintillating adornment is a necessity given the scarcity of available females. For me, as the youngest of many children navigating emotional scarcity, hats and clothing felt like a necessity for connecting with my mother and staving off disappearance. Now, though, when I sense that a colleague views clothing through a lens of scarcity—as though we're competing for attention, as though there's not enough space for both of us to thrive—clothing shapeshifts from bridge to barrier, becoming a wall that we must scale before we can engage in genuine dialogue. And yet, even though clothing increases the strain of these situations, long-term habit sometimes leads me right back to clothing as the cure: my belief that wearing the right outfit will

foster meaningful connection and make me visible for who I am. When I invest clothing with this kind of communicative power, repeating an outfit feels embarrassing, like I'm recounting the same old tired story.

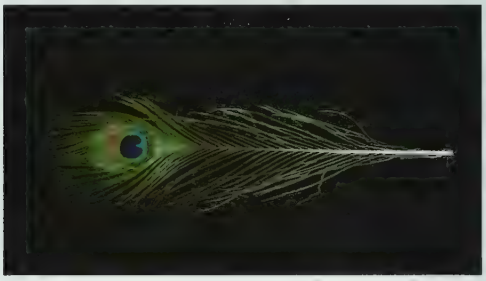
On an intellectual level, I understand that clothing cannot repair a fragile relationship. I understand, too, that relying on clothing will likely inflame, rather than dampen, tensions that emerge from one of the oldest economies of scarcity: the raced and gendered realm that pushes women to compete for power, resources, and visibility through our bodies and clothes.

I understand all of these things, but as I realized after slipping into that side street, old emotional habits die hard.

In Hans Christian Andersen's version of "The Emperor's New Clothes," the swindlers posing as weavers claim to make magnificent clothes that remain invisible to those who are unfit for office. Fearing their own incompetence, all the adults in the story pretend that they can see nonexistent clothing. No one will acknowledge that the emperor is actually naked.

In my fractured fairy tale, the clothes aren't invisible; the emperor is. Actually, others see her and consider her fit for office, but the emperor can't see herself. So she piles on layers of clothing, hoping that all that silk, velvet, and brocade will prevent her from being naked, risible, invisible. When will the emperor learn to see herself?

Feeling hypervisible or invisible, ostentatious or overlooked: peacock vs. peahen touches a raw nerve. Perhaps, though, worrying about peacocks' shimmer has made me slow to recognize a central insight from my lifelong romance with clothing: the desire to be seen is not vanity; recognition by self and others is a human need, intertwined with our needs for attachment, communication, and self-expression. Whether mottled brown or iridescent blue, my clothes keep me attuned to my own frequencies, to my hard-earned solidity, emotions, and relationships. "I know you," I've learned to say when magical thinking appears at my door, peddling its false promise that others will remember and value me if I don the perfect outfit. The trick is to remember that clothing can spark conversation, but it's not a magic key for forming relationships. The trick is to think like a hermit crab: shells come and go, but I carry "home" wherever I go. The trick is to think wardrobe, not outfit, a body of work rather than a single phrase: the "me" I shore up when dressing endures regardless of my clothes.



The thing is, though, dressing is like writing: both create a readable record, and both inspire a range of interpretations. No matter how carefully writers arrange their ideas or wearers arrange their clothes, readers assign their own meanings to texts and textiles. And when it comes to clothed bodies, readers inevitably read them as *bodies* that evoke particular histories, fantasies, desires, fears, and resentments.

In my undergraduate course called Threads: What Does Clothing Have to Do with Race, Culture, Politics, and the Environment?, I ask my students to read about others' experiences as clothed bodies before they begin crafting their own narratives.[5] In *The Book of Delights*, for instance, we meet Ross Gay as he's sitting in a Detroit café, contemplating how loitering—being unproductive and unconsumptive—is viewed as a crime in America, particularly for Black people, like Gay, whose bodies are "supposed *to be* one of the consumables." Gay explains that if he wears the right clothes—a Patagonia jacket, Tretorn sneakers, an Ivy League ball cap—he can "almost" challenge the equation of dark skin and loitering. But the fact remains that being Black in America requires a "constant internal negotiation towards safety," always being on the lookout "for the policer of delight." Gay thus tries to claim ownership of his own time and revel in moments of nonproductive "black delight."[6]

In *The Collected Schizophrenias*, my students and I meet Esmé Weijun Wang, who views clothing as "weaponized glamour," an "intimidation tactic, as with the porcupine who shows its quills."[7] Like Gay, Wang understands how much our capitalist society values productivity, so she uses high-end clothing to project that she is "living with schizoaffective disorder" but is "*just like you*." "After all," Wang muses, "what kind of lunatic has a fashionable pixie cut, wears red lipstick, dresses in pencil skirts and tucked-in silk blouses? What sort of psychotic wears Loeffler Randall heels without tottering?"[8] At the same time, Wang acknowledges that distancing herself from those who visibly struggle with mental illness is like shunning a large part of herself, and she knows that "no amount of snappy dressing" can conceal times when she, too, is "dodging specters" that no one else can see.[9]

Reading about precarity, projection, and porcupine quills prompts me to think more about how my own clothed body operates in the world. I tend to view clothing as a means of connection, but if my clothed body projects white, middle-class, heterosexual femininity, when does that projection serve as protection, my own version of weaponized glamour? When does my adornment (my ankle tattoo?) thwart common readings of my clothed body as nonthreatening, respectable, demure, well-heeled? How does my body-in-clothes inhibit or invite connection across lines of difference in classrooms, in prisons, in private and public spaces?

During a recent trip to Japan, I saw thousands of statues adorned with cloth bibs, usually red but sometimes brocade, calico, or buffalo check. Tiny or grand, foxes (*inari*) or bodhisattvas (*jizo*), these statues appear in shrines, temples, cemeteries, and schoolyards, sometimes sporting hand-knit berets, aprons, capes, sunglasses, even makeup. Dressing an *inari* or *jizo* is a means to care for aborted fetuses, dead children, childbearing women, parents in their afterlives, and the "unconnected" or forgotten dead. Though new to me, this centuries-old practice feels familiar: clothing as caregiving and protection, an oblique form of communication, tangible longing for proximity and connection amid distance, absence, and loss.

Jizos in Okunoin Cemetery, Koyasan, Japan, 2018.

A *jizo* in Okunoin Cemetery, Koyasan, Japan, 2018.

A *jizo* adorned with face makeup in Okunoin Cemetery, Koyasan, Japan, 2018.

To redress:

to remedy or set right; to relieve from distress; to make fair and equal; to compensate for wrong or loss. From Anglo-French *redresser*: to set upright, restore, set straight.[10]

I think of redress as I read about Ross Gay wrapping "a plush purple thing" around his neck—an infinity scarf handmade by a friend—and renouncing conceptions of masculinity tied to misogyny, homophobia, and a "moratorium on the pretty." Gay views his scarf as an "exteriorization of a shifting interior," an outward sign of his desire to be softer.[11] For Gay's forty-second birthday, redress also takes the form of wearing "clanging colors" and bedecking himself "in every floral thing imaginable," including earrings, socks, and hibiscus-patterned drawers. As he puts it, setting aside his "sad performance" of "nonflamboyance" offers "some bit of healing for my old man, surely, who would warn us against wearing red, lest we succumb to some stereotype I barely even know. (A delight that we can heal our loved ones, even the dead ones.)"[12]

Redress surfaces, too, in Barrie Jean Borich's "Of Wearing My Red Dress." Like me, Borich kept lists of her daily outfits during high school, adding items that she wished were part of her wardrobe. She now thinks of these lists as a way to feel less "exiled" from her body, as representations of longing, as the "first narrative threads" of who she might become. Clothing has helped Borich to reconcile a multiplicity of "me"s, including a "me" who surfaced after considerable weight loss, reminding her of the female body she wished she had "finished reckoning with in [her] twenties." A lesbian feminist, Borich wrestles with the fact that she enjoyed new attention from men after her weight loss. Still, she fondly recalls clothing-inspired moments when she was "fifty going on fifteen."[13]

Red, a red dress, redress. Red is not my color, but I share the sense of clothing as an exterior that concretizes a shifting interior. Clothing as an imagined exterior that conjures a future interior. Clothing as a means to "write stories on the body" and to counter stories that others map onto particular bodies.[14]

Gay and Borich also point to the unruly temporality of redress, how it leaps off the track of time, shuffling past, present, and future, enabling a hibiscus-adorned son to offer a bit of healing for his deceased father or a "fifty going on fifteen" woman to don a red dress and reckon with her earlier self. Perhaps the artistry and joy I find through clothing can offer a bit of redress for my parents' brokenness. Maybe embracing moments when I was twenty going on twelve or fifty going on five allows me to write the narrative threads of who I might become.

For Marcel Proust, it was a madeleine; for me, a tie.

It was only a moment, fleeting and unexpected. I picked up the tie from a display in the men's store, one that reminded me of him with its fine hand, autumn hues, and antique paisley print. Suddenly, he was alive again, in a wave of warmth and fullness that made me pause and close my eyes. When I opened them a few seconds later, I bought my first tie: my silk paisley lifeline to my dad.

The orange patch she sewed over Raggedy Ann's heart. The plaid pants she converted into knickers. The *Little House on the Prairie* dress that transported me to another time. The gigantic poppies she insisted I wear after returning from Paris. The long-loved suede suit she sent me shortly before her death. My mother's forms of redress, her oblique efforts to dress my wounds, goad me into claiming space, parent me in the best ways she could.

She wore my brother's cast-off T-shirts and jeans—hardly peacock material. She was all peacock, though, in yoking aesthetics and survival. Her own canvases were watercolors and rock gardens, but she was on to me and clothing. And when I exposed the depth of my need long after dressing my dolls was an option, she seemed to view dressing me as the solution. I resisted her timing, her method, her aesthetic—too late, too controlling, too loud. But what lingers with me now is her impulse: *Reach for beauty. Discover what shimmers. Claim it, use it, try not to let it go.*

I'm in a high-end Tokyo department store, surrounded by kimonos in a painter's palette of silks. When an elegant, kimono-clad saleswoman sees me admiring traditional obi belts, she invites me to try on a kimono and then starts circling my waist with a twelve-foot piece of stiff silk. For the next twenty minutes, we're all alone in the crowded store, communicating solely through gestures, touch, laughter, and our shared appreciation for the beautiful form she is creating.

Late at night, long after this interaction, I'm trying to understand why I felt so moved by this woman wrapping me in yards of silk. My mind drifts closer to home. I'm in my late teens, trying on dresses that my eighty-year-old great-aunt can no longer wear. My favorite is emerald green, with soutache-trimmed sleeves. As my aunt regales me with stories about various dresses, we giggle about how well-endowed she is compared to me. Then I discover—to my aunt's delight—that her dresses fit much better when I wear them backward. Problem solved!

Yes, clothing connecting women across lines of difference. But with the kimono, there is something more: being wrapped in yards of cloth and being dressed by a woman as I stand with arms outstretched, almost like a doll.

There it is. My mother. Caring for me through clothing, caring for me through clothing my dolls. Clothing as swaddling, a tactile, tangible comfort that bridges emotional chasms. "You look like a china doll," I was often told as a child. I made a hard-won transition from china doll to flesh-and-blood, far-from-perfect, full-grown woman. But for a moment, I am the doll, uncomplicated and easy to love. Just wrap me in beautiful cloth and let time stand still.

Dress and redress: an ouroboros, a Möbius strip.[15] Each inheres in the other, overlapping in meaning and practice. With its redundant "re-," redress recalls the iterative nature of dressing: the countless, daily ways in which we engage in the work of mending. The steady beat of tending to what's tender. Arranging, aligning, putting things right. Remedying, relieving, restoring. Smoothing our surfaces and compensating for loss. The everyday cadence of living.

With Darwin's theory of sexual selection, here's what fascinates me most: If peacocks' ornamentation stems from their fundamental need to find a mate—in other words, if peacocks' biological need ultimately engenders beauty—then primal need can blossom into aesthetic pleasure.

I wonder, though: As peacocks provide visual pleasure for others, do they take pleasure in their own adornment? Do they enjoy beauty for beauty's sake, whether or not it serves its purpose?

One of my favorite pastimes is browsing online for a specific category of clothing: art nouveau capes, embroidered dresses, handmade shoes. Sometimes, I explore how a designer's obsession with brocades, peplums, or visible stitching unites a collection, transforming whimsy into a body of work. Browsing both settles my mind and sparks my imagination, preparing me to greet my own otherness. As experiences and relationships float in and out of consciousness, I think about what's catching my eye, what it might feel like to wear this color or that texture, whether it would look more Edwardian to wear the sleeves *this* way, how a garment might reinforce my edges or introduce me to new versions of myself.

What if all my ways to say—opaque or iridescent, patterned or plain, angled or straight, gathered or loose, diaphanous or coarse—were reduced to words? What word says purple Converse sneakers or sunflower-saturated sweater? How would I express paisley as opposed to houndstooth or organza? What metaphor might convey my dove-gray vintage blouse with a lace inset and buttons down the back? Could a song stand in for my deceased friend's earring-cum-necklace, a tiny figure with hinged arms and legs that dance as I move? How would I say the click of my boot heel? The angle of my hat? A loud rustle, silent billowing, or barely audible swish?

They're steel-toed "Old Gringos," like genuine cowboys wear, but festooned with floral embroidery. I took the plunge just before the COVID-19 shutdown, an extravagance magnified, as the pandemic continued, by the thought that I might never wear these beauties outside of my house. If a tree falls in the forest and no one hears it, does it make a sound? Of course! The sound is resounding for the tree when it knows how to listen to itself.

Scientists, it turns out, have long debated my question about whether peacocks appreciate their own splendor. In his theory of sexual selection, Darwin posits that animals' "taste for the beautiful" is not necessarily linked to survival; their "aesthetic faculty" allows them to appreciate beauty for its own sake.[16] Present-day evolutionary ornithologist Richard Prum agrees. Animals' beautiful adornment often stems from their "arbitrary" preferences, Prum argues, not from the adornment's connection to specific survival advantages.[17] "Animals are agents in their own evolution," he insists, because their aesthetic tastes shape their development. "Birds are beautiful because they are beautiful to themselves."[18]

As journalist Ferris Jabr explains, in the almost 150 years between Darwin's and Prum's writings, numerous scientists have ridiculed this notion of beauty without utility, in part because it presumes animals' cognitive sophistication and in part because it credits female desire—"feminine caprice," as one biologist put it—with creating standards of beauty.[19] Trying to rescue beauty from purposelessness, many scientists have hypothesized that an animal's ornamentation must be a signal for its survival skills, intelligence, health, fertility, or advantageous genes.

Recently, though, some biologists have concluded that animals' beautiful adornment is "neither wholly purposeful nor entirely random." According to this perspective, a peacock's tail embodies two "equally important evolutionary forces: utility and beauty." Multiple factors—environment, anatomy, evolutionary legacy, and peahens' "innate sense of beauty"—have contributed to peacocks' panache.[20]

Since the days of my earliest plumage, clothing has served as my envoy and ambassador, my courier and secret spy, my emissary to myself. A trusted messenger on a diplomatic mission, clothing represents my best interests and keeps me in touch with the many versions of me. My envoy informs me of my secret intrigues, pressing needs, and whatever may be going on behind the scenes. Clothing conveys my respects to far-flung reaches of myself, prepares us for high-stakes encounters, and, when we're on different pages, helps us negotiate our differences and broker a peace.

At the same time, my lifelong passion for clothing reminds me of ways in which my "taste for the beautiful" has made me an agent in my own evolution. It reminds me, too, of the surprising, incremental, yet ineluctable ways in which beauty and artistry emerge from scarcity and need.

"For need can blossom into all the compensations it requires."

Given all that we've been through, it seems fitting that I'm still a little starry-eyed about clothing. As language, talisman, and life preserver; as tool for self-invention; as boundary, buffer, and means for repair; as envoy to myself and others; and as source of profound joy, my clothes have been by my side, mending me as I mend them, constituting and sustaining the self they adorn.

And yet, questions of beauty, utility, scarcity, and need linger as my students and I read about wardrobe pledges inspired by environmental and labor concerns. I'm thinking, for instance, of Alex Martin's Brown Dress project (wear the same handmade dress every day for a year, styled with various accessories), Jane Milburn's Project 333 (wear only thirty-three articles of clothing for three months), or Katrina Rodabaugh's Make Thrift Mend project (wear no new clothing for a year, a response to the 2013 collapse of the Rana Plaza garment factory in Bangladesh, which killed more than 1,100 workers).[21] The truth is, if I gave away 80 percent of my wardrobe, I could live to the ripe old age of one hundred without ever purchasing another garment. And I would probably love the aesthetic challenge of fashioning outfits from limited options. Even if clothing has served as my life raft, why hold on to it now that I've become a strong swimmer?

This question assumes added significance when I shift my focus from the realm of emotional scarcity to the realm of planetary scarcity. Now that no amount of austerity or innovation seems sufficient for staving off environmental depletion, how should I think about my relationship to clothing, one of the most resource-dependent, pollution-generating, labor-exploiting dimensions of the global economy? What if my lifesaving practices of dress and redress are actually life-threatening for others and for the planet?

I mend and repurpose, knit and sew my own clothes, purchase vintage and secondhand, buy handmade or responsibly sourced garments, wash less and line dry. And yet, all my knitting and sewing can never undo the damage we're sowing through our practices of clothing production and consumption. We embrace an economic model of infinite growth, but our planet has finite resources.[22] Companies offset the damages of clothing production, but they keep overproducing.[23] We donate unwanted clothes, but African markets are overrun with what Ghanaians call "dead white people's clothes."[24] Entrepreneurs recycle textiles, but many use energy-intensive processes and create microfibers that contaminate our air, water, and food.[25] The global fashion industry employs one in six workers, but fewer than 2 percent earn a living wage.[26] As global textile production accounts for 25 percent of chemicals

and 20 percent of industrial water pollution, as 87 percent of manufactured clothes end up in landfills each year, as the production of our jeans, athletic wear, and cotton clothing guzzles water, pollutes waterways, kills aquatic life, and causes respiratory and reproductive illnesses in humans, does my passion for beauty justify my ongoing attachment to clothes?[27]

"Beauty is not a luxury," writes Saidiya Hartman. "Rather, it is a way of creating possibility in the space of enclosure, a radical art of subsistence. . . . It is a will to adorn."[28] While I have amply satisfied my need for clothing as protection from natural elements, dressing remains my art form, my means "to make straight" and "put into proper alignment," to "tend or cultivate," and when needed, "to apply protective or therapeutic covering, as for a wound." Not just a matter of basic survival, my will to adorn satisfies my hunger for creativity and joy, agency and expression, meaningful connection with self and others. Even amid our crisis of overproduction, I'm drawn to beauty in all its unproductive, delightful glory.

Still, how should I think about dress and redress if my individual efforts to mend will never come close to allaying our clothing-fueled environmental crisis? To broaden the question that haunted me in the wake of my father's death, what happens with the art of mending when the remnants are simply too scarce, when no amount of artistry or ingenuity can make them coalesce into something like a whole?

Threads

Can an unspoken history of violence and brutality find a language in the swish of a skirt gently caressing an ankle?
—Noliwe M. Rooks, *Ladies' Pages* (2004)

The flesh that passes through objecthood needs ornament as a way back to itself.
—Anne Anlin Cheng, *Ornamentalism* (2019)

"It is a truth that may be hard to imagine in a world devastated by illness and economic insecurity, riven by racism and unrest, but we will get dressed again," Vanessa Friedman writes in the summer of 2020. "It sounds ridiculous," she acknowledges. "Who cares what we will wear when there has been so much tragedy and economic destruction, when old wounds left to fester have been gashed open once again?" And yet, from the lavish adornment of the Renaissance that followed the bubonic plague to the flapper era and Harlem Renaissance that succeeded the flu of 1918 and World War I, history teaches us that after the trauma of war, pandemic, and recession, "dress is a way to signal the dawning of a new age.... It's a statement of belief in the power of beauty to lift the spirit," a show of faith in the future.[1]

I shared Friedman's piece with my students on the first day of my undergraduate course, Threads: What Does Clothing Have to Do with Race, Culture, Politics, and the Environment? Our class first met in January 2021, so we also read about the outrageous costumes worn by rioters who stormed the US Capitol Building and about Black men for whom wearing a mask is a bigger threat than the coronavirus. We read about a young American clothing-lover who lost interest in buying clothes during the isolation of the pandemic and about garment workers who lost their jobs during COVID-19, or received no pay, or made masks for others' protection while working—unmasked—in poorly ventilated and unsanitary factories. From that first day of class, I wanted my students to think about how intimate, personal questions about getting dressed might be linked to much larger-scale questions about "a world devastated by illness and economic insecurity, riven by racism and unrest." I wanted them to begin considering how individual experiences and choices related to clothing—a flapper's decision to forgo her corset and wear shorter hemlines, or their own decision to wear only clothing purchased in thrift stores—take place within broader social, ethical, and political realms.

Asking my students to toggle between personal and social questions related to clothing has led me to deepen my own thinking about dress and redress. Indeed, teaching Threads has pushed me to reflect on the connections between my clothed body and our national body, between the scraps of fabric I use for mending and the social fabric riven by myriad forces, between my personal narrative and broader ethical and political questions about the roles that clothing might play in processes of mending. While shuttling between an intimate scale and more distant scales introduces divergent time frames, geographies, and histories, such movement also opens up new possibilities for understanding mending.

The sartorial teachers and guides featured in my course inspire me to weave together a range of topics and contexts—archives, American slavery, US prisons, hoods, steeking, COVID-19, and environmental crisis—all of which raise crucial, interrelated questions about the roles that clothing plays in both individual and collective forms of mending. As a lifelong mender, I want to think more about how mending, as I understand it, might be useful for stitching together a world that feels broken. I want to understand what redress has looked like, and might look like, in a country that has routinely used clothing to dehumanize and dispossess, to subordinate and sever connections. Attending to dress and redress is crucial, Threads suggests, for tending to a world that needs mending.

> [Text and textile] are the preservative technologies of our time. They bear on their surface the memory of touch, the possibility of history. —POULOMI SAHA, *An Empire of Touch* (2019)

"It's an almost crushing pleasure," says shop owner Lauren Naimola, sharing how a well-preserved Edwardian coat brings tears to her eyes.[2] I nod, tears in my own eyes, thinking about the near nausea, breathlessness, and system overload I often experience in the presence of vintage clothes. For some, it's unsettling—even distasteful—to think about clothing's previous occupants. But for me, a vintage garment is an embodied archive, an intimate, deeply moving record of another's experiences. When I wear a hand-sewn Edwardian blouse, I feel a next-to-skin connection with the maker who dwells in her intricate handiwork, in the patterns of movement etched into the "memory" of the blouse. The "traces of the inhabitant are imprinted" in textiles, historian Walter Benjamin reminds us, and as fashion scholar Jessamyn Hatcher notes, vintage garments "never lose the imprint of the body that was once inside them"; because chemical reactions between the fabric and the wearer's body are ongoing, the wearer's perspiration can alter the molecular structure of the fabric even one hundred years later.[3] Wearing a used garment—a kind of redress—reanimates its previous wearers through secondary epidermal contact, creating new, often unexpected lines of kinship. The "world is present" in every object, Benjamin writes; an object's "entire past"—its origin, various uses, and previous owners—resides in it like "a whole magic encyclopedia."[4] As literary scholar Bill Brown puts it, the "detritus of history" lingers within everyday objects, making them the "material unconscious" of a culture.[5] And as artist and author Edmund de Waal suggests, the "sensuous, sinuous intertwining of things with memories" calls us to attend to what objects have "witnessed."[6]

But when I wear my Edwardian blouse, I'm also reminded of all that I will never know about what it has witnessed, all the ways in which "a chain of forgetting," as de Waal calls it, distances me—despite our cell-level connections—from its previous makers and wearers.[7] The chain of forgetting reminds me, too, of all the stories of dress and redress that have never been told, that remain trapped in lost or forgotten objects, mute witnesses to lives deemed too unimportant to chronicle.[8]

Who will bear witness to all that has been witnessed by garments too tattered for display in a museum?

How will we know what stories a faded apron longs to tell?

A single textile or garment, Tiya Miles reminds us, can carry the stories of multiple generations. In *All That She Carried: The Journey of Ashley's Sack, a Black Family Keepsake*, Miles tells the story of a cotton seed sack that was passed down through four generations of enslaved Black women, lost in the mid-twentieth century, and rediscovered at a flea market in 2007.[9] Currently on display at Middleton Place, a former plantation in South Carolina, Ashley's sack is embroidered with the following story, stitched by her descendant Ruth Middleton in 1921:

> My great grandmother Rose
> mother of Ashley gave her this sack when
> she was sold at age 9 in South Carolina
> it held a tattered dress 3 handfulls of
> pecans a braid of Roses hair. Told her
> It be filled with my Love always
> She never saw her again
> Ashley is my grandmother.[10]

Piecing together every shred of evidence that might counter the chain of forgetting, Miles helps us envision what Ashley's sack witnessed: a socially powerless mother who "gathered all of her resources—material, emotional, and spiritual—and packed an emergency kit" for her daughter's future, "a radical imagining for a Black mother in the 1850s." With her inclusion of a tattered dress, Rose offered Ashley "protection, honor, artistry, memory, and connection." Her act of dressing could never fully redress the harms it was intended to counter, but it reverberated through decades, offering Ruth Middleton embodied traces of her great-grandmother's strength, ingenuity, and love.[11]

In the Smith College Historic Clothing Collection, more than three thousand dresses, suits, shoes, and accessories bear witness to the lives of the women who wore them from the nineteenth century through today. Largely of unknown origins and bearing stains, tears, flaws, and traces of mending, the clothing in the collection includes dresses made from feed sacks, heavily mended house dresses made from cheap gingham, "Blessed Event" maternity dresses, and reversible "Hooverette" dresses that women wore for housework and then turned inside out to greet their husbands at day's end. Curator Kiki Smith takes particular interest in women's "social uniforms": clothing that signals identity and offers an "anthropological road map" of women's daily roles, from maid, mother, or housewife to go-go dancer, lawyer, or pilot. The collection is a reminder that dressing, like writing, leaves a record. Clothes are "journals into women's lives," Smith explains, and underarm stains, fading, and patterns of wear offer invaluable clues to the daily experiences of ordinary women. Unfortunately, old clothes are so tied to female bodies that museums and institutions often fail to recognize their value, and the fate of the Smith College clothing collection hangs in the balance.[12]

"The constancy of the human presence that permeates every surface. / This is the poetry we are seeking," writes Pablo Neruda.[13] In a tattered dress or faded apron, I am seeking the poetry of menders' tender touchings permeating forgotten fabric. In the "permeated impurity" of clothes, I am seeking what unwritten stories of dress and redress might teach me.[14] I am seeking the constancy of poetry born of the constancy of violence absorbed by cloth. In discarded, sweat-stained garments, I am seeking the human presence of makers, dressers, wearers, washers, and menders whose efforts to find sustenance in an "unbearable present" endure in the fibers they once touched.[15] If cloth is "a means of incorporation," a time-honored way to bring humans into networks of care, obligation, and belonging, I am seeking to reincorporate those whose dignity, desires, and needs have been witnessed by garments but disavowed by fellow humans.[16] In cloths and clothes that never find their way to museums, I am seeking the resilience of the tattered, the persistence of the faded, the reminder of the remainder, the poetry of mending.

Can I get a witness?

> I have a vivid recollection of the linsey-woolsey dress given me every winter by Mrs. Flint. How I hated it! It was one of the badges of slavery. —HARRIET JACOBS, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861)

They clothed white women and children, entire plantation households, governors, wives of US presidents, and US presidents themselves.[17] As house servants, nursemaids, cotton pickers, spinners, weavers, and seamstresses, enslaved Black women spent their days, and often nights, engaged in the labor of dressing others. These women were forbidden, however, to dress themselves as they saw fit.

South Carolina Slave Code, 1735

> Whereas, many of the slaves in this Province wear clothes much above the condition of slaves, for the procuring whereof they use sinister and evil methods . . . no owner or proprietor of any negro slave or other slave whatsoever (except livery men or boys) shall permit or suffer such negro or other slave to have or wear any sort of apparel whatsoever, finer, other, or of greater value, than negro cloth, duffelds, coarse kearsies, osnabrigs, blue linnen, checked linnen or coarse garlix or calicoes, checked cottons or scotch plaids, garlix or calico.[18]

New England mills manufactured coarse cloth specifically designated for dressing unfree people. Enslaved women's dresses were straight and shapeless, often cut directly on the body to avoid wasting fabric. In a culture that prized gender differences, these ill-fitting dresses imposed an androgynous appearance on Black women and justified charges that they were immodest, fueling their masters' sense of sexual ownership. At the same time, elite white men and women used fine clothing to bribe enslaved women, pairing sexual coercion with gifts of clothes or offering a nice dress as enticement for bearing more children.[19] Little wonder, then, that thirteen-year-old Louisa Picquet risked taking a bribe from her drunk master so that she could purchase "a nice, full dress." Picquet paid dearly for her dress; when she did not return for the sexual exchange her master expected, he permanently scarred her with a whipping and sold her to another man as sexual prey.[20] Enslaved women also paid dearly for creating and wearing clothing considered above their station. When Silla, a woman enslaved in Charleston, South Carolina, secretly sewed a dress, mantilla, and beautiful bonnet to wear to her house of worship, her mistress forced her to burn her bonnet and don a bandana, her only authorized headwear.[21]

"Can an unspoken history of violence and brutality find a language in the swish of a skirt gently caressing an ankle?"[22]

Yes, the brutal history of American slavery suggests. "Talking of dresses, making dresses, and donning the self-defense of dresses was a balm for enslaved women's sufferings, sorrows, and sullied dreams," writes Tiya Miles. "Their decorous apparel, sewn by hands intent on surviving 'the lowest yet,' was raiment rolled in blood."[23] By hiring themselves out for paid work, purchasing clothes through pawn shops and underground markets, or working a second shift at night to make clothing for religious gatherings and secret revelries, unfree women transformed a daily instrument of harm and humiliation into a source of sensual pleasure, artistry, and self-possession.[24] Through their practices of dress and redress, they embodied what Jonathan Square calls "black sartorial genius."[25]

Black sartorial genius sometimes took the form of quiet assertions: a hat and earrings crafted from straw, a belt from mulberry bark, a necklace from cranberries. A skirt dyed with poison ivy, cured with urine, and starched in hominy water. A pair of wooden shoes painted yellow to match a dress.[26] At other times, "sartorial rebellion" took bolder forms: A hoopskirt fashioned from grapevines and tree limbs, a potent symbol of white women's idleness, wealth, respectability, and protection from bodily harm.[27] A swatch of fine fabric or bit of silk thread pilfered from a mistress. A linen shirt, waistcoat, and trousers stolen from a master and sold in secondhand markets along the escape route to the North.

If human history is a chronicle of systematized precarity, it is also a record of humans finding ways to survive in economies of scarcity.[28] It's a story of people's daily refusals of social death, a narrative—in Gwendolyn Brooks's words—of "the least and commonest flower" emerging from "smashed corpses."[29] And while clothing is sometimes dismissed as frivolous or insignificant, history teems with traces of dress and redress as potent means to counter violence and brutality, as sometimes subtle and sometimes bold assertions of self, dignity, and creativity in conditions of unfreedom. In our current precarious times, when global and planetary crises exacerbate centuries-old forms of precarity born in American slavery and settler colonialism, I find hope in imagining the sartorial genius of enslaved Black women whose insistent agency and artistry are rarely chronicled in museums.

A row of buttons fashioned from gourds and covered with bits of cloth.

A butter-soft, crimson-colored dress adorned with ceramic beads, snippets of silk ribbons, and bits of leather.

A skirt with ample, swishing folds that gently caress their maker's ankle.

> In the medieval Western world, [people dressed in striped clothing] are all outcasts or reprobates, from the Jew and the heretic to the clown and the juggler, and including not only the leper, the hangman, and the prostitute but also the disloyal knight of the Round Table, the madman of the Book of Psalms, and the character of Judas. They all disturb or pervert the established order; they all have more or less to do with the devil. —MICHEL PASTOREAU, *The Devil's Cloth* (2001)

Hunger. After endless days, months, and years of wearing drab, shapeless uniforms, women in my prison book clubs seemed hungry for color, soft textures, beauty, and the freedom to choose daily adornment. "Ooooh, can I touch that fabric?" they'd say, and "I can't wait to see your colors." I had initially planned to wear nondescript clothing so that I'd blend in with the prison environment, but I was soon wearing clothes made of velvet, brocade, and the deepest hues in my closet, hoping that a tiny bit of aesthetic pleasure might—if only for a few hours—feed women's senses, challenge their dehumanization, make their days a little less endless.

Our interviews and discussions focused on the subject of reading, but mending was often our subtext. One day, during a group discussion of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, dress and redress took center stage. Recalling how the protagonist, Janie, wore a "faded shirt and muddy overalls" to her husband's funeral, a woman named Denise described her own intensely painful experience of wearing "a purple jogging suit from K-Mart" when she was temporarily released from prison to attend her mother's funeral. "It's a certain kind of grief where you don't care about how your hair look," Denise explained. "I understand that kind of grief where none of this don't matter."[30] Incarcerated for repeatedly shoplifting clothing, Denise believes that her "love of fashion and clothes" stems from the extreme poverty in which she was raised—as a young child, she would "fantasize" that she owned clothing pictured in the Sears catalog—and from her fifteen-year relationship with an abusive man who forced her to shoplift as a means of financial support. Reading about Janie's refusal to heed others' criticisms of her clothes serves as balm for Denise, a form of redress for the

burning shame she still feels about her own funeral outfit. "I loved that part in that book," she shared, "that somebody else know that kind of grief and had the nerve to write about it."[31]

If we could talk more about dress and redress, I'd want to understand what it's like for the women I met in prisons to wear a prison uniform day after day, year after year—whether they try to make it feel like their own, how it relates to their sense of the passage of time, how much they think about clothing, and whether they miss wearing certain garments or kinds of clothes. I'd want to know how they interpret and respond to prison policies about clothing and what they think incarcerated people should be allowed or required to wear. And underneath these questions, I'd hope to understand: Has clothing ever helped you to mend from harms you may have inflicted or sustained? And if your own clothing can't serve as a prison survival kit, what other resources do you turn to in an environment designed to limit your agency, creativity, individuality, pleasure, self-expression, dignity, and interpersonal connections?

Centuries of incarcerated people's experiences with clothing remain unheard. But if we listen closely, the history of American prisons tells its own stories of dress and redress.

In pre–Civil War prisons, for instance, most prisoners were white men because African Americans were typically punished by slave masters and white women were typically punished at home.[32] By clothing white men in black and white stripes—long associated with outcasts—penal officials hoped to spark shame, penitence, and moral rehabilitation.[33]

Things changed in 1865 with the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, which authorized slavery as punishment for a crime: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." Coupled with the Black Codes—laws that criminalized everything from "using profane

language" to failing to provide written proof of employment—the Thirteenth Amendment shunted thousands of recently emancipated Black men and women into the convict lease system, where they performed unpaid, often deadly labor for privately owned coal and iron mines, railroads, cotton and sugar plantations, brickyards, sawmills, and turpentine farms. Deemed "worse than slavery," the convict lease system lasted from 1865 until 1928, and it quickly changed Southern prison populations from majority white to majority Black.[34]

Unlike the striped uniforms worn by white men in pre–Civil War prisons, clothing for Black men and women in lease camps and on chain gangs had nothing to do with rehabilitation. Officials viewed their captive workers as so dehumanized and dispensable that they hardly bothered to clothe them. Wearing only tattered flannel—no shoes, underwear, or coats—convicts in chain gangs would march several miles to work in mines or wade through waist-high swamps to work the pine forests of the turpentine industry and then trudge home, sometimes with frostbitten feet, to sleep in their filthy, wet clothing.[35]

When it came to women, though, officials overseeing lease camps and chain gangs in Georgia took a different approach: they forced Black women—often through repeated flogging and whipping—to wear men's striped shirts, trousers, and shoes. This "compulsory defeminization" was part of an effort to shame and dehumanize Black women, so it offered them no protection from routine sexual assault.[36] But here's a story of redress that's barely a whisper in the record: Black women in lease camps sometimes practiced clothing arson. By burning the men's clothes they were forced to wear, these women refused their defeminization and undercut company profits, modeling "the untiring practice of trying to live when you were never meant to survive."[37]

Meanwhile, in 1904, progressive reformers were calling for improvements in prison conditions, and New York became the first state to stop using striped uniforms because the superintendent of prisons viewed them as a "badge of disgrace." By the 1940s and '50s, most US correctional facilities had eliminated prison stripes. In midcentury California prisons, for instance, gender norms were front and center in the

requirement that men wear khaki "work" clothes and women wear custom-made feminine house dresses in "gay prints."[38]

In 1957 and again in 2015, the United Nations weighed in on imprisoned people's clothing in the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. Listen to what the guidelines specify: "Every prisoner who is not allowed to wear his or her own clothing shall be provided with an outfit of clothing suitable for the climate and adequate to keep him or her in good health. Such clothing shall in no manner be degrading or humiliating."[39]

How have US prisons responded to these guidelines? By the year 2000, when African Americans were incarcerated in state prisons at more than five times the rate of whites, when African Americans made up more than half of the prison population in twelve states, and when Latinx people were imprisoned at 1.4 times the rate of whites, several states had resumed the use of striped uniforms, often in clownish color combinations such as orange and white or yellow and hot pink.[40] "The public loves them," a North Carolina sheriff said after he introduced striped uniforms in local jails and was reelected by a landslide.[41]

Punishing in pink is popular in US prisons, too. From 1993 to 2017, former Arizona sheriff Joe Arpaio forced incarcerated men to wear pink underwear.[42] In Alabama, imprisoned men who expose themselves to female staff are forced to wear hot-pink jumpsuits because pink is "the most embarrassing color."[43] In a Gulf Coast prison, incarcerated women who wear their uniforms in an "excessively masculine" manner are forced to wear a caftan known as "the pink dress." Women in this prison explain that they wear "loose-fitting uniforms for self-defence"; wearing oversized clothes that disguise their "feminine shape or body" makes them "feel less vulnerable."[44] Despite this desire for protection, I hear an echo of the convict lease camps, a reminder that wearing masculine-style clothing does not prevent bodily violation.

I hear echoes of the convict lease camps, too, in the clothing regulations in two contemporary California prisons for women. While officials forcibly defeminized Black women in Georgia's lease camps and chain

gangs, officials in today's California prisons for women practice "forced feminization" by criticizing gender-nonconforming people for wearing "baggy" or "sagging" clothing and by requiring them to wear women's underwear and a shirt with a "woman's neckline."[45] But I also hear an echo—a mirror image—of the redress performed one hundred years ago by defeminized Black women in Georgia: rejecting their forced feminization, some people housed in contemporary California prisons alter their prison-issued clothing, trade black-market undergarments, and create boxer shorts from sheets.

And here is another story of redress that has slipped through the gates of a California men's prison, a story of Black sartorial genius shared by Antwan, a clothing designer recently released from prison.[46] "Your prison uniform is a representation of the worst moment of your entire life," Antwan explains. Men's uniforms are "super baggy," and "every time you walk you have to like pull your pants up, and I have that feeling, as if like I'm a thug." After a close friend gave him a sewing kit and sewing lesson, Antwan bought two pairs of prison-issued pants, removed both right pant legs, each of which had the words "CDCR Prisoner" emblazoned in yellow from hip to shin, and created a pair of well-fitting pants by stitching together two left pant legs. "When I first put on my altered pants, I felt like I was in a GQ magazine!" Antwan recalls. His pants transported him "mentally and emotionally to other places out of prison," allowing him to reimagine his identity as a public person. Sartorial rebellion always carries a cost in spaces of unfreedom, and Antwan's alterations cost him twenty-eight days in solitary confinement. But this punishment did not stop him from subtly altering his pants. "Sewing actually helped me thrive and survive in prison," Antwan says. "I'm not going to walk around and look like I don't care about myself. . . . I refused to conform to what people believe an incarcerated person is supposed to look like."

We don't need to listen very closely to this microhistory to hear the central story about dress in US prisons: forcing incarcerated people to wear degrading and humiliating clothing is standard practice. It's a time-tested way to dehumanize and disenfranchise large swaths of our communities, a surefire method for hiding the evidence of our profound social failures under miles and miles of prison-issued cloth.

More difficult to hear in this story is what we, as a nation, refuse to redress. A century after the end of the convict lease system, chain gangs have been reinstated in states such as Arizona and Florida. At the same time, on costume sites such as Walmart.com, HalloweenCostumes.com, and Yandy.com, white models sport "Bad Boy" costumes for men, "Incarcerated Cutie" costumes for women, black-and-white-striped prison costumes for children, a "Play Pen" T-shirt with arm tattoos for infants, and "Chain Gang Prisoner" costumes for all ages, complete with striped overalls, shovels, and a guarantee that this "retro style" will be "a fun trip through time."[47]

Black men leased to harvest timber in Florida, ca. 1915. Photo courtesy of the State Archives of Florida.

Prisoner costumes available at HalloweenCostumes.com, 2022.

By temporarily playing prisoner, white Americans can revel in the racialized fantasy of the transgressive convict. Then, when their fun is over and they remove their prison stripes, revelers can reinforce their sense of distance: distance from imprisoned people forced to wear striped uniforms and distance from historical and contemporary realities of brutally racialized and gendered forms of punishment.[48] What no costume change can hide, however, is the fact that our fates are inextricably intertwined. Until we fully reckon with our nation's origins in gendered practices of slavery and genocide, until we redress the inequities produced by contemporary practices and institutions linked to those origins, until we find ways to ensure our collective safety and well-being without relying on prisons, no amount of suturing will help our national body to mend.

In the meantime, if we lean in closer, we can hear the story whispered in the smoky ashes of a burnt uniform, the hidden stitches of a subtly altered neckline, the shine of shoes polished with banana peels, the sharp pleats of pants pressed under the weight of a prison mattress.[49] It's the story of incarcerated people determined to mend, and to live, in conditions of extreme scarcity and constraint.

Sometimes clothing is a decoy, a convenient distraction that impedes the work of mending.

"I think the hoodie is as much responsible for Trayvon Martin's death as George Zimmerman was," Geraldo Rivera opined.[50] Naming the decoy, Roxane Gay responded, "Discussing the hoodie is the same as discussing what a woman was wearing if she was raped. What was George Zimmerman wearing when he shot Trayvon Martin? Did his outfit contribute to his paranoia and vigilantism?" Further illuminating the role assigned to clothing in public debate about anti-Black violence, Gay added, "Trayvon could have been wearing a My Little Pony t-shirt and George Zimmerman would have perceived the young man as a threat. We cannot center this discussion around clothing. We cannot allow a piece of clothing to bear the brunt of the responsibility that belongs to the murderer and to the society that created him."[51]

Trayvonning: reenacting Martin's murder, dressing up in hoodies, posing as though shot, and posting the photos online.[52]

"You can't (legally) ban people from shops or schools because they're Black," notes Alison Kinney. "You can ban them for wearing hoodies."[53]

Hoods as decoys have a long history. In *Hood*, Alison Kinney explains that illustrator George Cruikshank prompted a nineteenth-century fad for painting hooded executioners, even though executioners up until that time did not actually wear hoods. "These sinister, hooded executioner images enabled reformers, then and now, to draw self-congratulatory delineations between savage, old-timey executions, and supposedly humane, dignified, superior modern capital punishment," Kinney writes. In turn, forcing incarcerated people to wear hoods dehumanizes them and renders them compliant, "making it difficult to breathe, speak, or struggle, and impossible to look executioners or witnesses in the eye."[54]

Hoodwink:

— 1560s: "to blindfold, blind by covering the eyes," from "hood" + "wink."
— During the 1500s, "to wink" meant to shut both eyes firmly.
— Placing a hood over the eyes effectively closes them, so *hoodwink* came to mean "to dupe."[55]

"I wouldn't want [my son Jay] out in the public walking with a hood on because of the stereotype that people might have about kids, especially African American boys, in hoodies," explains Bonita Wise in a podcast about hoodies. "One day he came home. His pants, they were kind of sagging...so he can kind of fit in. So that's why we decided to take him out [of school for almost three years]....I didn't want him to fit in."

Interviewer Chenjerai Kumanyika responds, "People are out here getting shot by police behind broken taillights or selling CDs, and you really think Jay's clothes are going to be what makes the difference? Can his clothes protect him?"

Knowing that the answer is no, Bonita Wise replies, "I've seen too many moms on television crying because, you know, they've lost their child. And I don't want—I don't want that to be me.... I mean, it sounds hypocritical, but what else do you do to protect your child?"[56]

Sometimes, even with both eyes shut tight, we know the real story is not about clothes.

> How many ways can you splice a history? Price a country? . . . Entice what's been erased back into story? —SHAILJA PATEL, *Migritude* (2010)

I'm in a small secondhand kimono shop in Kyoto, Japan, learning about the complex language of kimonos from a saleswoman dressed in a stunning cobalt, flower-adorned, antique kimono. It's my second visit to the shop. The saleswoman is teaching me how to recognize the saturated, complex colors characteristic of silk made before World War II and how to choose an obi suited to the era, formality, and quality of a kimono. As she wraps several different kinds of obis around my waist, she explains her preference for older kimonos, which tend to be more subtle than the bold, brightly colored designs that younger women now wear. Tying her own obi still takes thirty-five minutes, she shares, even after years of practice. Our interaction is delimited by language barriers and commerce, but I find myself tearing up as we say goodbye.

I'm in an outdoor market in Kyoto, watching two young white women emerge from a kimono rental shop dressed in colorful kimonos, wooden sandals, and floral headpieces. As they parade through the marketplace, giggling and waving handheld fans, other market-goers pay them little attention. After a few minutes, I turn away from the scene, flooded with shame and questions: When does clothing help to span chasms, and when does it deepen them? What distinguishes appreciation from appropriation, honoring from playacting? Do the realities of consumption inevitably compromise the communicative value of clothing? What makes some white American women feel authorized to adopt others' adornment? What, if anything, differentiates them from me?

Clothing as bridge or barrier, a means to connect or divide, calls to mind the knitting term *steeking*. The steek is a bridge of stitches that fastens two parts of knitting together, but steeking—a process that strikes fear in the hearts of many knitters—means using scissors to cut through in-progress knitting to divide one part from another, as when making a cardigan from what would otherwise be a pullover. Beyond the sphere of knitting, *to steek* means to stitch or sew, to shut, to close securely, but it also means to kill by stabbing, to pierce with a spear, sword, knife, or horn. This toggle between suturing and severing, between securely closing and violently invading, speaks to my fears about the roles that clothing plays in cross-cultural encounters. While I want clothing to serve as a source of connection or redress in such contexts, it sometimes serves as a source of rending and harm. Because our intentions cannot dictate how others read our clothing, our efforts to diminish distance may actually increase it.

In 2015, Boston's Museum of Fine Arts hosted "Kimono Wednesdays," inviting visitors to don a red silk kimono, "channel [their] inner Camille Monet," and pose for a photograph in front of Claude Monet's *La Japonaise*, an 1876 portrait of Monet's wife wearing a blond wig and red *uchikake*. This program had been successful in museums in Tokyo, Kyoto, and Nagoya, but in Boston, protestors forced the museum to cancel "Kimono Wednesdays." Members of Stand against Yellow Face @ the MFA argued that "Kimono Wednesdays" did nothing to educate museum visitors about the "origin, history, uses, or importance" of the Japanese kimono, the experiences of Japanese women, or late nineteenth-century Parisians' obsession with Japanese aesthetics.[57] Moreover, the museum was inviting visitors to reenact what Monet seemed to be mocking: non-Japanese people's fetishization of Japanese culture. And the garment on display was not even a kimono; it was an *uchikake*: a lined silk robe with a padded hem, meant to be worn over a kimono and obi for formal occasions or stage performances.[58] Some defenders of "Kimono Wednesdays" noted that "kimono try-on is an established part of Japanese cultural sharing" and that Japanese craftspeople custom-created

the kimono for the event.[59] Other commentators acknowledged that the museum erred in creating a "costume event," but they lamented that the protests taught museum visitors to fear interacting with other cultures and foreclosed visitors' opportunities for "intimate" engagement with the "weight and feel" of a Japanese garment.[60] Six months after the protests, Boston's MFA hosted a panel discussion about "Orientalism, racialized iconography, institutional racism, representation of minority groups, and cultural appropriation." Museum officials apologized for "the lack of context and content" and invited audience members to respond to this question: "What should the MFA do and learn so that we don't repeat the mistakes of 'Kimono Wednesdays'?"[61]

Shailja Patel, author of *Migritude*, understands the violence of cultural appropriation. A third-generation East African Asian, Patel writes of Iraqi weavers who made mosuleen, a fabric so fine you could fit thirty yards into a matchbox. She writes of "the Barbarian. Imperialism": British colonizers who hunted down Iraqi weavers and "chopped off their index fingers and thumbs" because their mosuleen competed with sales of British cloth. Patel writes of Kashmiri shawls adorned with teardrop-shaped ambis, which "wove their way through the dreams of Victorian wives" when "bandits" from the British East India Company imported them to Britain. And she writes of Paisley, Scotland, a village where weavers learned to make "imitation ambi, on imitation Kashmiri shawls, and got to keep their index fingers and thumbs." Through these cultural thefts, Patel explains, "Kashmiri became cashmere. Mosuleen became muslin. Ambi became paisley."[62]

But in telling such stories, Patel also models how clothing might serve as an ethical means to foster cross-cultural understanding and communication. *Migritude* revolves around a trousseau of eighteen saris that Patel's mother intended to give her as a wedding gift. When her mother finally accepts that Patel has no plans to marry, she gives her daughter the saris to celebrate her chosen path as an artist-activist. Patel, in turn, declares her intention to focus her creative work on "the deep,

hard, complex beauty that unfurls when saris speak."[63] Her saris speak as Patel tells stories about myriad forms of violence: British colonization of Kenya and Kenya's bloody war of independence; British soldiers' systematic rape of Kenyan women; Asians' expulsion from Uganda in 1972 and from Kenya in 1982; East African Asian immigrants' experiences of racism in the United Kingdom and the United States; immigrants' loss of their mother tongues. At the conclusion of her book and performances, Patel finally shares her eighteen saris with her audience. By then, she explains, "the audience has finally earned the right to see the saris in all their splendour. Because they've engaged with the violence and violation beneath. Sat through the unbearable and absorbed it. Listened to the voice of women from within the bootprint of Empire. They've paid for the experience of beauty, sensuality—and they understand the cost."[64] Just as claiming a word requires "earn[ing] its meaning" by steeping it "in terror and shit, / in hope and joy and grief, / in labour, endurance," Patel suggests that clothing can bridge cultures—even foster mending—if those who engage with it are sufficiently steeped in the history and practices of the culture from which it originates.[65]

As with tea, itself steeped in colonial theft of resources and labor, steeping suggests a patient process of diffusion and absorption, an investment of time longer than the click of a camera shutter. The cost of steeping is not just an entrance fee; it is a willingness to soak in all that must be understood, a readiness to confront the "terror and shit" of history and one's own place in that history. Steeping suggests, too, a need for guidance, an intimate encounter—whether in person, through media, or on the page—with teachers steeped in the culture that a garment represents. And steeping requires understanding how a single garment can be freighted with the weight of unprocessed histories and ongoing realities of racialized violence and subjugation. With "Kimono Wednesdays," for instance, some Japanese people celebrate others wearing kimonos both inside and outside of Japan, while some Japanese Americans may feel more protective of Japanese culture in the wake of US internment practices during World War II—which prohibited Japanese Americans

from wearing Japanese garments—and amid ongoing anti-Asian currents in the United States.[66]

Steeping requires an active choice to engage—making information available does not guarantee engagement—but it preserves the possibility that clothing, one of the most intimate, daily aspects of human experience, can help us get proximate, at the level of skin, with the histories, practices, and beliefs imbued in its fibers. Setting aside the Boston MFA's perplexing invitation for visitors to dress up as a white woman dressing up as a Japanese woman, I wonder what might have emerged from teaching visitors about the rich history of kimonos through a series of Japanese paintings, a mini-exhibit about silk production, a video of a Japanese woman tying her obi belt, and an opportunity to touch a swatch of kimono silk or to feel what it's like to wear the dramatically long sleeves of a *furisode*, typically worn by young women for special occasions. I want to hold open the space of abundance at the interface of cultures, where new relationships, understandings, feelings, and forms of expression can emerge from steeping not just in "terror and shit" but also in the "hope and joy" of spoken and skin-to-cloth dialogue about clothes.

Six Ways of Wearing a Vintage Kimono

1 I purchase it at a US thrift store. Wearing a full-length kimono and traditional obi belt outside of Japan would feel inappropriate to me, so I refashion my kimono as a knee-length garment and secure it around my waist with a narrow ribbon.

2 I wear it with jeans during my trip to Japan. With surprise and delight, several Japanese women—young and old—admire the garment, ask where I bought it, and share that they've never seen a kimono worn that way. "I'm going to try it!" a middle-aged woman tells me.

3 I wear it with a tea-length skirt to teach my Threads class, knowing that I'll feel too hesitant to wear it after our upcoming discussion of Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*, a novel that raises questions about Orientalism.

4 I decide not to wear it to the wedding of a distant family friend because I do not want to risk a misreading.

5 I wear it with a makeshift velvet sash for a small holiday party, hoping that my friends will read my clothing choice in relation to my long-term interest in textiles. Hoping, too, that they know how to read *me* regardless of my clothes.

6 I wear it thinking about steeking and steeping. I wear it believing—hoping—that clothing can foster genuine cross-cultural communication, creating kinship without replication, enabling intimacy without neutralizing difference.[67]

Shortened antique kimono, purchased by the author from a thrift store in 2015.

When I introduce the idea of clothing theme days for my Threads course, hedging because I don't know if my students will be game, they jump at the chance to have meaningful social experiences with clothes during a year of Zoom-only classes. The students choose a theme for every Wednesday: stripes, hats, hoodies, dress up/fancy, "I woke up like this" (PJs), tacky sweater, tie-dye, favorite shirt, "if you could only wear one outfit for the rest of your life," and not-fashion. At the start of class, we take a screenshot and listen to volunteers' stories about their outfits: an enormous fluffy pink stole (fancy day), flamingoes decked out for Christmas (tacky sweater day), an embroidered jean jacket passed down from a grandfather ("if you could only wear one outfit for the rest of your life"), a sixteenth-century ruff hand-sewn from yards of lace (not-fashion). On theme days, clothing animates our Hollywood Squares, reminding us of our bodies, histories, joys, human connections.

> The attention the media lavished on fashion designers and brands offering to donate PPE glossed over the actual conditions of workers making these products.... When garment workers in the two Myanmar factories making Zara-branded face masks asked for PPE for themselves, they were fired. —MINH-HA T. PHAM, "'How to Make a Mask'" (2020)

> Is it safer for my son to risk COVID than to risk being seen as a tall Black man in a mask? —KIM HOHMAN, quoted by Usha Lee McFarling, "'Which Death Do They Choose?'" (2020)

Used to toning down their appearances to lower suspicion, wearing college T-shirts when they run, and "dressing like prospects, not suspects," many [Black men] immediately considered mask choices that might be safer and allow them to return home from their grocery store trips or—mindful of the killing of Ahmaud Arbery—jog through the neighborhood alive. —USHA LEE MCFARLING, "'Which Death Do They Choose?'" (2020)

When we re-engage with a world pockmarked by pain, and see one another—from more than just the shoulders up—what will we want to wear? . . . Fashion is created for the future, and that implies faith in that future. —VANESSA FRIEDMAN, "This Is Not the End of Fashion" (2020)

New mask is floral. Don't shoot. —KIESE LAYMON, quoted by Usha Lee McFarling, "'Which Death Do They Choose?'" (2020)

> Clothing's life as desirable object is short, but its life as a material object is long. —KIRSTY ROBERTSON, "The Afterlife of Clothing" (2019)

It's nauseating. Reading about the history of clothing production and consumption churns my stomach.

First, the labor issues: our clothes have been made by enslaved people, imprisoned people, children, sweatshop workers, and ill-treated garment workers in the United States and around the world. From budget to luxury fashion, the industry is plagued by worker exploitation and abuse, health and safety violations, sexual harassment, and race-based inequities, erasures, and appropriations.[68]

Then, the environmental issues: 63 percent of textiles are made from petrochemicals, the synthetic indigo used in most jeans includes ten toxic chemicals, fifty billion new garments are made each year, the average American buys sixty-eight garments and throws away eighty pounds of clothes every year—distressing statistics pile up higher and higher like the surplus clothing that companies bury or burn.[69]

How can this source of tremendous harm be my primary means of mending?

It's the environment that brings many students to my Threads course. I wasn't thinking about environmental concerns decades ago when I started buying vintage and thrift store clothing, but for undergraduates on the cusp of inheriting a world going up in flames, secondhand shopping often seems like the only ethical choice.

United by our love for clothing and our fears for the planet, my students and I read about large-scale strategies for making clothing production more responsible: local supply chains, "circularity" (creating recyclable clothes that can be broken down again and again into their original

components), "oil to soil" recycling (using microorganisms to convert petrochemicals into natural nutrients), and innovative technologies like dissolvable thread, a waterless technique for dyeing new denim from old, and clothing materials made from a broad range of waste, such as orange peels or plastic culled from oceans.[70] We have questions about unintended consequences of "biofabrication" (creating clothing materials from microorganisms, such as lab-grown spider silk), but our biggest question is more basic: Do we really need to keep making so many clothes?[71]

The smaller-scale strategies offer us a bit more hope. There's "mendfulness": Katrina Rodabaugh's name for the art of being mindful, knowledgeable about broader conditions, and committed to making ethical decisions about caring for clothes.[72] And the "craft of use": Kate Fletcher's term for being enchanted with what we already own, approaching clothing as part of a playful and experimental process, and practicing "true materialism" by attending to the physical dimensions of our clothes.[73] My students and I are on board with "mend, tend, and lend" approaches that offer a range of creative suggestions: Wash less, line dry, avoid dry cleaning, and freeze your jeans instead of washing them.[74] Practice "visible mending," drawing attention to imperfections with colorful embroidery or *sashiko* stitching.[75] Participate in collective endeavors that involve vintage and used clothing, hand-me-ups, renting, swapping rather than shopping, clothing libraries, and returning clothes to companies that mend or repurpose their products.[76] Minimize your wardrobe through strategies such as "give-it-a-week" before purchasing, "shopping your closet," #30wears, #proudoutfitrepeater, and buying reversible or multiuse garments. View clothes as raw materials that can be radically revised, upcycled, or repurposed into rags, hankies, compost, bags, wall hangings, jewelry, or sculpture.[77]

Bret Moore, *Mended Pink Sweater*, 2021. Used by permission of the artist.

Susan Fletcher created this patchwork of *sashiko* stitching in 2015 and then fashioned it into slippers. *Sashiko*, which means "little stabs" in Japanese, was invented in seventeenth-century Japan and is used for decorative and functional reinforcement of cloth and clothing. Used by permission of the artist.

Our questions about these smaller-scale strategies hover around one issue: the relationship between individual and collective efforts to mend. As Steven Kurutz says about the practice of visible mending, it's "like choosing your mile of highway to pick up trash: It is a personal, small-scale, possibly futile response to the overwhelming problems of mass consumption and waste."[78]

As I mull over dress and redress in the context of environmental crisis, my thoughts return to my dad and the questions that gripped me after his death. Now, I find myself thinking on a broader scale: What does "enough"—having enough, doing enough—look like within an economy of planetary scarcity? With the collective art of mending, what happens when no amount of ingenuity or reordering can make the broken pieces coalesce into something like a whole?

The question of "enough" preoccupies some environmentalists, too. As Sarah Ensor explains, "enough" is a word often used "to chasten" those whose practices roam too far beyond the bounds of necessity; "enough" is an "indeterminate quantity" that signals we must content ourselves—in the name of the future—with having "less than we might otherwise want."[79] The question of "enough" also signals the pressing fear of not doing enough to stave off ecological disaster. It evokes the plaguing, prescient sense of failing to stem daily deterioration, to prevent the ultimate, devastating accumulation of minor losses.

When this pressing fear rises in my throat, I remind myself that mending takes different forms in different contexts. Sometimes, we have more to work with from the start, more hope of assembling fragments and pieces into something like a whole. At other times, we begin with less, and the best we can do is gather what's useful, salvaging every bit of meaning and possibility even when those bits will never add up to anything like a whole. Sometimes, as I learned with my father, mending is a means to prevent the past from becoming a black hole that wrenches everything into its singularity. With our environmental crisis,

perhaps mending offers a means to prevent the *future* from becoming that black hole. The damage may be irreversible and the dreaded future may have arrived, but with our individual and collective mending tools in hand, perhaps the crush of gravity and fear of annihilation can still give way to breath, movement, and reimagination.

I don't mean to sound defeatist; I'm not suggesting that we blissfully patch and embroider our jeans without another thought about our ecological crisis. Rather, I'm thinking about mending as a way to adopt an "affirmative sense of 'enoughness,'" a stance—as Ensor describes it—that is about "persistence or continuity" rather than longing for a past that will never return or a better future that may never arrive.[80] While I recognize that I—and we—cannot fully fix or solve our myriad environmental problems, I don't think of this approach to mending as a cop-out. In the context of ecological disaster, mending is about embracing the work of redress even when I know that it may not matter, even if we can never know what might be "enough."[81] It's about choosing my mile of the highway—since I'm not equipped to invent a planet-saving technology—and committing to stitch and share and repurpose and create and learn and collaborate and live *as if* all that mending matters. This kind of mending is about inhabiting "a quietly affirmative state," the kind that allows for fashioning a button from a bit of fabric-covered gourd or pressing a pant leg under a prison mattress.[82] It's about always being ready to embrace the immanent ethical, communal, and collective possibilities that can emerge from disaster, being poised to find plenty amid barrenness, scarcity, and irrecoverable loss.

At the same time, mending is not just a helpful metaphorical stance for approaching planetary crisis; it is also a resolutely material and ethical practice that can make a significant difference even when enacted at an individual scale.[83] On one level, individual acts of mending can contribute to—and catalyze—collective efforts for change. On another level, mending as a literal practice of minimizing clothing consumption and extending the lives of existing garments calls for rigorous reckoning with the ethics of dressing. Insistently reminding me of interdependence, mendfulness pushes me to keep asking these pressing questions: What is the shared cost of my sartorial delight, and who pays the price? Do we really need so many clothes? Do I really need so many clothes?

"In the tactile encounter between skin and fabric," Poulomi Saha writes, "there resides the possibility of imagining otherwise what political commitment and shared life might look [like] in the face of our own materiality."[84] In the many encounters between skin and fabric gathered in Threads, I see possibilities for imagining otherwise, for challenging the assumption that the past is always "an abused record with no choice but to repeat itself."[85] I envision a world in which a skirt gracing an ankle tells a story of artistry, not unspeakable violence. A world in which the difference between life and death has nothing to do with wearing a Patagonia jacket or a floral mask. A world in which clothing is not a means to degrade, humiliate, and disenfranchise but a means to "get proximate," to care for each other and practice interdependence.[86] A world in which mendfulness and the craft of use guide us in fashioning individual and collective selves, reminding us that grief and loss can be conditions of collective emergence. A world in which getting dressed again amid global-scale mending, environmental crisis, and myriad forms of inequity and injustice keeps us attuned to our creative capacity for repair, our exquisite ability to jump out of well-worn grooves, break our cycles of violence, and compose new strains of music.

Such imagining is crucial. And yet, given the twinned legacy of horror and hope created by clothing, perhaps it's more fitting to conclude with a lesson about mending from Baby Suggs, a character in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Images of piecing, quilting, patching, and mending thread throughout *Beloved*, a novel about formerly enslaved people learning to fashion a sense of self and community in the aftermath of bondage. An enslaved man named Sixo beautifully describes this individual and collective process when he says of his lover, "She gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order."[87] Baby Suggs reminds us, however, that the process of mending is endless, arduous, and uneven, and at the end of her life—feeling "starved for color," defeated, and bone-tired from the violence of "whitefolks"—Baby Suggs says to her daughter-in-law Sethe, "There's more of us they drowned than there is all of them ever lived from the start of time. Lay down your sword. This ain't a battle: it's a rout."[88] Later, as she recalls her grandmother's final days, Baby Suggs's granddaughter Denver

is standing on the porch at 124 Bluestone Road, feeling unable to move yet aware that she must venture into the world if she and her mother Sethe are to survive. Suddenly, Denver hears Baby Suggs reminding her of all that her ancestors withstood. "You mean I never told you nothing about Carolina?" Baby Suggs asks. "About your daddy? You don't remember nothing about how come I walk the way I do and about your mother's feet, not to speak of her back? I never told you all that? Is that why you can't walk down the steps? My Jesus my."

"But you said there was no defense," Denver responds.

"There ain't."

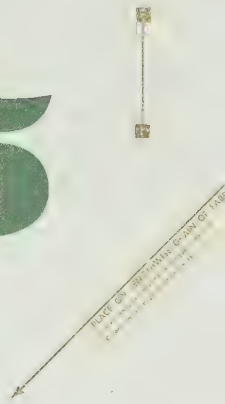
"Then what do I do?"

"Know it, and go on out the yard. Go on."[89]

As white supremacy thrives, as thousands of species die, as the world seems to be going up in flames, it's easy to share Baby Suggs's sense of defeat and Denver's sense of paralysis. But like the maxim "pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will," popularized by Antonio Gramsci, Baby Suggs's words encourage us to "know it"—to face the worst that our thin imaginations have wrought—and to "go on out the yard" anyway, ready to seek beauty, meaning, and possibility in our practices of dress and redress, committed to participate in the never-ending, life-sustaining work of mending.[90]

Charlotte Bailey, Kintsugi vase repaired with gold thread, 2016. *Kintsugi*—"golden joinery"—is the ancient Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with a lacquer dusted with powdered gold, silver, or platinum. Related to *wabi-sabi* (finding beauty in imperfection), *kintsugi* embraces artifacts' histories by showcasing their fractures and seams. In creating this *kintsugi*-inspired vase, British artist Bailey used no glue; she took a shattered vase, wrapped each piece in fabric that resembles porcelain, and painstakingly stitched the pieces together using gold metallic thread. Moved by the art of "beautifying damage" or "elevating a perceived flaw into something altogether more valuable," Bailey enjoys the challenge of "patchworking" in a three-dimensional form. Source: https://hangingbyathreadembroidery.wordpress.com/2016/06/02/kintsugi-vases/.

Mending



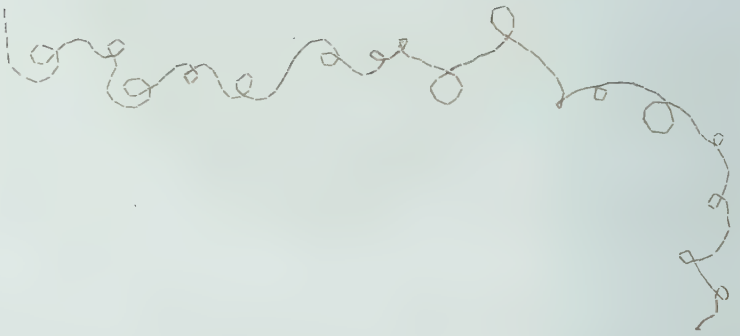
Lace is the history of women,
a series of holes that make a design.
—Dana Sonnenschein, "A History of Lace" (2020)

What do you call the space between the stitches?
—Tiya Miles, personal correspondence (2018)

I saw it hanging on the wall of my favorite vintage shop. Not for sale, the owner said; it's too fragile to wear. Please, I begged, captivated by the luminous ivory silk and subtle embroidery of the turn-of-the-century blouse. Every time I wear it, new tears appear in the crease lines of its sleeves, encoding my bodily rhythms atop those of previous wearers. Every time, I mend the tears, often retracing sutures I've made before. Weaving my needle in and out of the fabric, I think about fragility and resilience, loss and longevity. I contemplate varied forms of mending.

Though brokenness is often passed down through generations, mending defies the laws of inheritance; each mender must devise and enact their own process. In this spirit, what follows is neither a how-to guide nor a one-size-fits-all roadmap; it's a far more modest offering: six ways

of looking at mending through the prism of my particular experiences. For insight and inspiration, I call on a long line of women versed in the art of mending, women who—for centuries—have used needlework and fiber arts to "attach their personal narratives and artistic visions to the fabric of familial life"; to embody and resist ideals of femininity; to contemplate grief and decay, generation and healing; to perform political dissent; to practice the art of survival.[1] Our dialogue illustrates how personal and social dimensions of mending overlap, how mending as a term and a practice traverses various materials, histories, and communities, opening up myriad possibilities for transforming holes into design.



--- 1 ---
Making Do

On a visit to the Churchill War Rooms in London, I came across a pamphlet called *Make-Do and Mend*. Published in 1943 by Great Britain's Ministry of Information, the pamphlet was part of a campaign to encourage British housewives to "get the last possible ounce of wear out of all [their] clothes and household things." The pamphlet advises readers to "salvage every inch of material" by using worn leather belts to mend shoes; by using tiny scraps from worn garments to make hanging loops and bindings for buttonholes; and by mending garments using unraveled thread from a seam, unraveled yarn from a pocket, or binding made from the gauntlets of worn leather gloves. *Make-Do and Mend* explains techniques for darning, decorative patching, and mending everything from stockings to rubber girdles. It also counsels readers how to "be a magician and turn old clothes into new" by converting men's clothes into women's, crafting a new coat from two old ones, saving just the front of a blouse to wear under a jacket, replacing worn underarms with decorative panels, and enlarging underwear by adding strips of ribbon.[2]

British Ministry of Information, *Make-Do and Mend* booklet of wartime tips, 1943.

While *Make-Do and Mend* emerged in a context of wartime scarcity, the economy of scarcity it evokes for me is closer to home. Calling to mind a pincushion cactus that sprouts a crown of magenta flowers in the desert, or an epiphyte that sends out a three-foot extension in search of sustenance, the pamphlet highlights the audacity it takes to bloom where you're planted, reminding me of my four-year-old self sporting paisley, striped, and fur crowns as my means to "make do and mend."

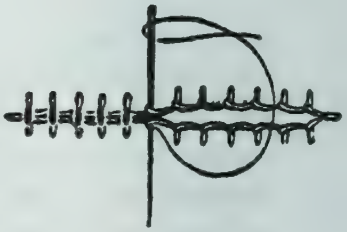
When my letters replete with underlining, exclamation points, tears, and blood failed to signal the need for repair in our topsy-turvy household, I turned to other currencies: clothing and injured bodies, both my own and those of my dolls. When I was far too old for dolls but still struggling to communicate within my family's tangled circuits, I used my body to convey my anguish and impose a sense of control as I faced an inconceivable future: a state of independence that I felt both precipitously pushed toward and barred from achieving. As my mother and I worked to refashion our relationship, clothing served as a tool for addressing my physical and emotional starvation, for defining my edges and repairing my severed connection to my embodied self.

The strategies I used to make do and mend were sometimes ineffective, even self-harming. That's the thing about mending: the tools at hand are often inadequate for meeting our needs, and even our most reliable tools can sometimes be counterproductive. But when I think of my younger self, I can't help but admire her resourceful efforts to make do and mend. And when I envision others' efforts to make do and mend—an enslaved woman preparing for the sale of her nine-year-old daughter, a housewife clothing her family during World War II, an incarcerated man preserving his human dignity through acts of "black sartorial genius," a man donning a floral mask to navigate the twinned forces of anti-Black racism and COVID-19—I stand in awe of the creativity, grit, and powerful human spirit at work in efforts to recast lack as potential, to salvage every inch, every ounce, every scrap, and every thread as a means to survive amid myriad forms of scarcity.

"Miss, why are there staples in your dress?" my student asked. Mending wasn't high on my list of priorities as a brand-new fourth-grade teacher, so I had used my ready-to-hand stapler to fix the hem of my dress. Decades later, "by any means necessary" is still my approach when I'm excited to wear something but short on time for repairs. I've stapled sleeves of antique blouses, worn dresses backward for improved fit,

safety-pinned seams on almost-finished garments, even sewn myself into an outfit to secure its complex draping. "Hell for style," as my grandmother would say.

When I went to "sewing camp" shortly before starting to write *Mendings*, other participants spent the week making brand-new garments, but I salvaged beadwork from a beloved, threadbare sundress and sewed it onto fabric panels that I then fashioned into a skirt. And every night, a master seamstress and I spent hours brainstorming about ways to revive some of my old clothing. Sewing a garment from whole cloth has its charms: creating a perfect fit, choosing just the right notions, using fabric inside out, upside down, however I want. Overall, though, I find the process less satisfying than mending and making do. When I follow a pattern, I'm wary of missing a required step, afraid of making irrevocable mistakes, aware that my ambition outstrips my skill. With mending and making do, there's no rule book, just a gut-level sense that time and attention will foster an unfolding or becoming: an interesting yet unassuming detail, an eye-catching bit of panache, an organic otherness cultivated by the mender. The process is often circuitous and filled with wrong turns, but finding my way is part of the joy of the journey.



One-way darning stitch, *Make-Do and Mend*, 1943. This suturing stitch—half completed in this image—is one of many techniques featured in "The 'Stitch in Time,'" a chapter that highlights strategies for making the most of scarce resources. "You could unravel the pocket of a knitted garment to provide thread for a darn," the authors suggest, "and a patch made from a matching belt may save a frock from the bits and pieces bag." If "you can't get a patch to match the cloth," the booklet advises, you can "make your mend as decorative as possible" by choosing a patch that creates "a sharp colour-contrast," by applying a patch with "fancy stitching" such as feather-stitch or herringbone, or by giving the patch "a fancy shape" such as a diamond or heart. Source: British Ministry of Information, *Make-Do and Mend*, 9, 11.

- - - 2 - - -
Proximity

I come from a family of fixers: three lawyers (including my father), three social workers (including my mother), and one medical doctor, with specializations such as disaster relief, death penalty defense, immigration, and health care in Haiti. My mother, who set the standard, was game for every fix-it job that came her way, from a broken dishwasher to the many clients she served as a social worker: elderly shut-ins, alcoholic men, suicide-hotline callers, and various "wayward souls" she invited to live with our family. Anyone or anything, my mom suggested, could be fixed with the right amount of determination, elbow grease, or steel wool.

Over the years, my family's fixation with fixing has prompted questions about proximity and distance. From my mother's vantage point, I fit the definition of frontline fixer in my roles as a social worker and an elementary school teacher working with immigrant children. However, my subsequent work as a professor of English, African American studies, and women's and gender studies struck my mom as too distant to be of much use. From my vantage point, my mother relished getting proximate with pain and healing from all walks of life, but she seemed to recoil from pain and need closer to home. She seemed more comfortable with tending to others' spiderwebs than with mending her own.

Contrast in styles.

Now that I'm well versed in mending my own webs, I recognize that certain forms of repair—like those my mother prioritized—take place obliquely, at a few steps removed from oneself. Such forms of repair are crucial, but they differ from the work that I've wanted and needed to do for myself.

Indeed, I've come to understand that fixing differs from mending. As traditionally conceived, fixing involves performing an action or series of actions on something broken so that it can function as well or almost as well as it did prior to being broken. Fixing may require adding something new, removing something that no longer functions, or reconfiguring an existing component so that it works properly again. Fixing can be done by one who is directly affected by the brokenness or by one who has no relation to that which needs repair. With fixing, the goal is to repair and then forget about the state of brokenness; after it has been fixed, an item should draw attention neither to its former brokenness nor to its altered state subsequent to repair.[3]

While fixing can happen from an emotional distance, mending requires emotional proximity and introspection. It may involve someone distanced from the mender in time and space—even separated by death—but the work cannot happen at a remove from the mender because it's not about repairing someone else; the locus of mending is the mending self. Whether brokenness relates to oneself, an interpersonal relationship, a nation's violent history, or a planetary crisis, mending involves close-range, ongoing emotional engagement, an extended process of coming to terms with what is broken. Sometimes this coming to terms looks like repair. At other times, it looks like learning to live with fragments that will never add up to a whole.

For me, the proximity central to mending calls to mind approximation. Defined as an adjective, *approximate* means "close to the actual, but not completely accurate or exact," or "close in value or amount but not precise." Defined as a verb, it means "to come near or approach," "to come close or be similar to something in quality, nature, or quantity," or—in a medical context—to bring tissue edges together for suturing.[4] This sense of approaching without arriving, coming close without fully replicating, or bringing two torn edges close enough to be stitched together captures the spirit of imperfection—the enoughness—at the heart of mending.

The measure of mending can never be whether brokenness has been restored to full functioning. What matters is the mender's commitment to seek understanding, to grapple with the persistence of the past yet remain receptive to possible realignments, to find ways to live amid all that is torn, partial, or irreparable.[5] Whereas fixing is about fixity—rendering the unstable permanently stable, locked into place—mending is a gerund, a continuous action. It's about mutability and movement, drawing on the liveness of the past as a resource for inhabiting the dynamic present. As Caitlin DeSilvey notes in *Curated Decay: Heritage beyond Saving*, the root of the word *curation* is the Latin word *curare*, "to tend" or "to care." In this sense, mending involves curating, or closely tending to, the past. It involves bearing "witness to absence" while at the same time recognizing that loss "can be generative of something new." It means embracing how processes of fraying shape our identities as much as "processes of consolidation and stabilization."[6] Mending means staying proximate enough to find meaning in what persists rather than trying to restore what once—or never—existed.

- - - 3 - - -
Incorporation

When my family insisted that my soon-to-be-husband and I request a wedding gift, we asked for a large, wooden floor loom, the kind that comes with a bench and several shuttles that rise and fall when you press various pedals. We were thrilled by the prospect of making hand-woven cloth. Thirty years and only two sets of placemats later, our loom sits idle in our front hall closet, but weaving still permeates my imagination. Indeed, I think of mending as incorporation: a dynamic practice of meticulously examining and unraveling relationships and experiences, and then weaving the weft of new insights into the warp of my initial understanding.[7] For me, incorporation is a laborious, embodied, ongoing process of integrating the past with my present experiences, attempting to assimilate that which is other to my current self.

Two artists—Israeli textile designer Gali Cnaani and American fiber artist Paula Stebbins Becker—concretize my sense of incorporation. Working with secondhand garments, Cnaani unravels or "unpicks" parts of each garment into weft and warp threads and then reweaves the weft threads—often combined with copper thread, for added strength—into new warp threads. Her process yields whimsical creations: wrists from two different shirts woven into a single sleeve or a shirt sutured to the side seam of a pant leg. Cnaani is interested in the "memory" of the fibers, the information they retain even as she unravels and reweaves them.[8]

Gali Cnaani, *Trousers and Shirt*, 2012. Photograph by Yigal Pardo. Used by permission of the artist.

Paula Stebbins Becker follows a similar process, sometimes unraveling and reweaving a second time and then adding embroidery, applique, stitching, or beading. Fascinated with the merging of past and present, Becker calls each iteration of her textile "a new generation."[9]

Paula Stebbins Becker, *Anni*, 1995. Used by permission of the artist.

Cnaani's and Becker's weaving practices evoke the painstaking labor entailed in unpicking the warp and weft of our experiences and choosing which strands to reintegrate into our design. The "new generations" of self that incorporation yields may seem cumbersome or unwieldy, and it's sometimes impossible to fully integrate particularly painful, confusing, or challenging experiences. But as the works of Cnaani and Becker suggest, a complex beauty can emerge from efforts to incorporate various versions of ourselves.

Nakshi kantha, a textile tradition from East Bengal, now modern-day Bangladesh, offers another way to envision incorporation. Making "a whole out of discarded, worthless bits," Bengali women created *kantha* cloths from "reborn remnants of familiar cloth": several layers of "discarded fabrics of the body," such as cotton saris, pressed together and sutured with lines of small stitches called running stitches. Women often pulled the thread for stitching from the borders of old saris, and they created ornate designs of lotuses, geometric figures, animals, birds, and scenes of rural life that took from six months to three generations to complete.[10]

Detail of *nakshi kantha* quilt crafted in Bengal during the early twentieth century. Courtesy of the Collection of Zach Zaman, Heirloom (heirloombk.com).

Kantha cloths materialize my sense that we are palimpsests, selves constructed through a continuous, generations-long process of stitching together our layers of experience, trying to determine which to hold onto and which to let go, which feel easy to integrate and which feel unassimilable, which are ancillary and which are central to our design.

I wonder: With stitches removed and interior layers exposed, what would my fabric cross section look like? Viewed through time-lapse photography, what might my successive "generations" reveal?

The mother who didn't respond to my letters and the mother whose nurturing entailed sewing and sowing. The mother who sought to make me her replica and the mother who helped me to take my own measure. The mother who didn't contact me in France and the mother with whom I now feel in intimate contact, across a distance more insurmountable than an ocean.

The father whose absence was a "one-handed clap" and the father whose brief presence was a magical blossoming. The father who conflated financial and emotional support and the father who parlayed his wealth into a lifetime of public service. The father who inspired me to hone my mending skills and the father who led me to discover that mending sometimes means embracing ghostly spaces where warp remains bereft of weft.

The child wearing a striped stocking cap and the woman wearing German fashion. The five-year-old who drew the STREEKER and the forty-five-year-old who made photo collages for her father. The teenager trembling with anxiety and the professor celebrating tenure. The young woman desperate to disentangle from her mother and the middle-aged woman delighted to intertwine. The daughter tracing lines on her father's face and the daughter redacting lines of her father's obituary. "Your impoilit pig girl" and the author of *Mendings*.

Megan Sweeney, hand embroidery, 2017.

- - - 4 - - -
Intertwining

As part of her performance pieces called *Mendings*, *The Catalogue of Holes*, and *Maps of Wear and Tear: The Art of Darning*, British textile artist Celia Pym has listened to many stories of loss while mending visitors' socks, T-shirts, and sweaters. For Pym, the damage in a garment is an "echo of the physicality of the body," and mending preserves "a relationship" with the person who inhabited the clothes.[11] During one of Pym's multi-day mending performances, a woman visited her twice, carrying a huge, moth-eaten sweater that belonged to her recently deceased husband. As her two children crawled through their father's unraveling sweater, the woman never asked Pym to mend it; she just wanted to share stories about the grief lodged in its fibers.[12]

Like this grieving woman, I have shared with others many stories about the love and loss lodged in my garments. For me, mending is simultaneously an individual, close-range process and a fundamentally social process, one that I've come to think of as a form of intertwining. Unlike enmeshment, which suggests confused boundaries and fused identities, intertwining calls to mind the durable structure of yarn. Yarn makers create stronger, more balanced fibers by twisting a single strand of yarn and then adding one or more strands by twisting them in the opposite direction. The mending self similarly gains strength and balance by intertwining, by positioning the self as dialogic, a self-in-relation.

In the company of friends, family, students, incarcerated women, writers, and artists, I have traced knots and snarls back to their origins, learned to repair and repurpose, and devised ways to live with seams that will not hold. Both patient and probing, my fellow travelers have generously received my stories, sharing their weight, helping me to recognize their substance and improbable beauty. In return, I have sought to receive their stories with equal care. Through our intertwinings, we recognize how individual, seemingly isolated experiences fit within broader patterns of harm and repair, and how profound social problems manifest in individual bodies, psyches, and relationships. Intertwining

is difficult but ultimately sustaining, even joyful work. I love the dialogue, the ways in which one person's process of mending can catalyze another's, the constant reminder that self-making and world-making happen in collaboration with others.

With siblings, the need for detangling can complicate intertwining, particularly if one's keepsakes seem to others like outtakes best excluded from the family scrapbook. What a gift, then, when a few of my siblings asked to read my work and shared extensive reflections—even pages of written memories—that fit like missing pieces in the puzzle I've been assembling. Commingling our stories has offered us new ways to appreciate, and learn from, each other's ongoing processes of mending.

We tend to think of inheritance in unidirectional, vertical terms: an orderly column of stitches with one stitch begetting the next, paths of descent like steps of a staircase—a name (Senior→Junior→III), a trait (mother→daughter→granddaughter). But intertwining follows multidirectional, horizontal, nongenerational, even accidental paths, producing affiliations that enable me to re-member myself, my family, and my communities.

A great-grandmother's silk stockings, an antique christening dress, a bit of lace from a mother's wedding veil: friends often gift me clothing items that bear their own family histories. One friend sent vintage curtains that she thought I could repurpose into a jacket and skirt. Out of the blue, another gave me a large bag of her hand-me-down clothing, with a story to accompany each item. From a beloved friend who died of cancer, I inherited utterly impractical clothes that I treasure as

heirlooms: a cobalt toreador jacket with Liberace-style embroidery, a corduroy hat with an enormous brim, an oversized vest made from the curlicue fleece of a lamb. Wearing these items around the house, I intertwine with my friend, hoping to inherit some of her luminosity and courage, her gift for finding possibility amid rubble.

The thought of mending without such connections evokes a lone knitting needle, a buttonless buttonhole, a solitary scrap from my quilting bin.

- - - 5 - - -

Making

In "The Making (Migrant Song)," Shailja Patel suggests that mending sometimes takes the form of making. Describing herself as "outta control" and "exploding" with rage over the ravages of empire, war, xenophobia, and the destruction of the environment, Patel is determined to create something useful from "the carnage." As if persuading herself, she begins close to home, with a series of exhortations to make something out of the "wounded magnificence" of her parents:

> Make it out of the sari that wraps you / in tender celebration / like the mother you longed for / make it out of the mother you got / in all her wounded magnificence
>
> Make it out of every scar and callus / on your father's hands
>
> Make it / to find out / what your own hands are good for.

Patel then declares her intention to make something out of the brutal forces of colonialism:

> This is for the hands / hacked off the
> Arawaks by Columbus and his men /
> lopped off Ohlone children by Spanish
> priests / baskets of severed hands
> presented at day's end / to Belgian
> plantation masters in the Congo /
> thumbs chopped off Indian weavers by
> the British
>
> I make this work / because I still
> have hands

Through her acts of making, Patel "excavate[s]" words "swallowed down" and discovers what her own hands are good for in the wake of so much historical and ongoing violence. At the same time, her process of making allows her to "rediscover" her mother, whose fierce commitment to

teaching Patel how to survive has often felt like "a force as grim and determined / as a boot up the backside."[13]

Our experiences differ, but Patel's story resonates; my process of making has also led me both to reckon with historical and ongoing forms of violence and to rediscover "the mother I got / in all her wounded magnificence." While *feel* lurked in the shadows in our family, *act*, *move*, and *make* took center stage, and it was my mother who taught me about the power of making. I learned about making from her Rube Goldberg repairs and re-re-re-re-reupholstered chairs, from the tabard she sewed for me and the tweed cape she sewed for my doll, from her rock gardens and watercolor paintings. And from my mother's example, I began to understand how making can be a site for mending. As a gardener, my mom moved mountains, shoveled shit, and battled pests. But she also nurtured seedlings, replenished rocky soil, protected vulnerable growth, celebrated regeneration, and mourned death. In her flower beds, my mother appreciated strength and delicacy in equal measure and let herself be bowled over by beauty. And with paintbrush in hand, she contemplated the passage of time, the properties of light and shadow, the shapes of beloved and war-torn faces. Through her acts of making, my mom grappled with loss and possibility, hope and disappointment. She worked through anger and frustration, expressed her most tender sentiments, and modeled the intense effort required to wrest meaning and beauty from life's rocky soil. From my mother, I learned that we are all—like Toni Morrison's *Sula*—seeking our own art form, whether "paints, or clay," "dance, or strings," spices or ointments, words or code, soil or cloth.[14] And we all watch loved ones struggle to find the taste, texture, tint, or tone of their artistry, to keep believing it's possible to create meaning and beauty in a world that often suggests otherwise. By demonstrating her impulse to repair and her implicit faith in the power of making, my mother brought me to the doorstep of mending. With my own mending tools in hand, I have learned to forge connections between making do and making, between making and meaning-making, between the realm of emotions and the realm of aesthetics, and between individual and collective forms of repair.

While making sometimes serves as a site for mending, mending can also morph into making when layered processes of repair blossom into new creations. As Celia Pym explains in discussing her *Norwegian Sweater*, mending is about responding to a problem that "often seems impossible (beyond one's skills)," "inch[ing] your way in," and "making a solid form from an absence." By filling in her Norwegian sweater's holes with white yarn, Pym both mended and distorted "the landscape of damage," creating a new "lumpy and bumpy" terrain with a beauty all its own.[15]

Celia Pym, *Norwegian Sweater*, 2010. Used by permission of the artist.

Celia Pym, *Darned Fingertips*, 2016. Used by permission of the artist.

When I think of mending catalyzing making, *Project Runway* also comes to mind. After years of urging from my students, I watched an episode of the show and was instantly hooked. Metamorphosis! Transformation! A polyester bomber jacket becomes a svelte gown. A humdrum suit coat is reborn as a dress with undulating folds. Caterpillar and chrysalis. The hopefulness of hatching. Embracing risk is key: you can't make pants from pants. Mending-cum-making calls for serious swagger: take-no-prisoners ripping and cutting, the certainty that it's never too late to create.

- - - 6 - - -
Recursion

It takes only a few minutes to undo weeks of work: slip one loop off the needle, pull the strand, and—voilà!—a pile of unraveled yarn. For a recent project, I did my best to decipher a confusing pattern and managed to knit sleeves that looked like sleeves until I tried to attach them to the sweater's body. When I saw the problem, I took a deep breath, unraveled three-quarters of the sweater, and settled into the joyful space of repair. Joyful, I say, because I prefer the second, fourth, or eighth go-round over the first. With a redo, I've faced the worst—no choice but to start again!—and I'm better prepared to navigate trouble spots and gaps in guidance. I know, too, that half measures will never suffice: minor errors will accumulate if I don't go back to ground zero, and any time that I might save in the short run will be lost when I'm compelled to undo in the future. Yarn that has lived a little can be slightly fuzzy, developing a "halo" when interlocked fibers are pulled apart, but it's also a bit more loose and flexible. When I finally block a finished sweater—immersing it in sudsy water and then drying it in its ideal shape—I love how the stitches snuggle up to each other, resolve their tensions, and embrace the shape they've become. Even more, I love knowing their backstory, all the stages the stitches have been through before settling into their current design.

"Our bodies are mere catalogs of wounds," writes Geoff Manaugh, "imperfectly locked doors quietly waiting, sooner or later, to spring back open." Drawing a parallel between bodily wounds and environmental wounds—specifically, the irrevocable damage caused by gold mining—Manaugh explains that our bodily injuries "never really go away." Collagen binds our wounds, but our bodies must continually replace such binding throughout our lives. Without sufficient vitamin C, the body cannot produce collagen, and old wounds that seemed to have healed long ago may reappear.

From an environmental perspective, it's distressing to read about "planetary wounds" that "remain unhealed." Mines "grow in great metastasizing voids," Manaugh writes, leaving "sacrificed landscapes" littered with "abandoned shells of industrial insects," gashes filled with "discolored oceans of chemical runoff," and "cuts and incisions—wounds that will outlive us, scars that won't go away."[16]

And yet, from an emotional perspective, I find it helpful to acknowledge that wounds don different disguises but never really go away, calling us to devise ever-new ways to recognize their getups, to greet them when they come knocking and even anticipate their arrival. I take comfort in viewing emotional wounds as lived-in garments with a familiar softness and smell, with threadbare patches that routinely call for repair. Like a well-worn sweatshirt that beckons from my bureau drawer after a period of neglect, old wounds seem almost reassuring in their reliability, the certainty that they'll resurface from time to time, reminding me of their presence.

For me, the recursive nature of wounding doesn't imply stasis or infinite regress. In computer science, recursion entails solving a larger problem by solving progressively simpler, smaller instances of the problem. Through a recursive process, one problem can generate an infinite number of solutions, like a Russian doll that reveals smaller and smaller versions of itself.

With mending, the kind of recursion I have in mind doesn't yield tidy solutions and won't come to an end in the span of a lifetime. What rings true, however, is that over time, we can learn to address a recurring problem, recognize successive iterations as the same problem, and develop resources for approaching the problem from different angles. What also rings true is the circularity of recursion, the ways in which mending calls us back to ourselves. As Derek Walcott envisions in "Love after Love":

> The time will come when, with elation
> you will greet yourself arriving
> at your own door, in your own mirror

and each will smile at the other's welcome,
and say, sit here. Eat.
You will love again the stranger who was your self
Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart
to itself, to the stranger who has loved you
all your life, whom you ignored
for another, who knows you by heart.[17]

Through the recursive process of mending, I greet my earlier selves, sit in communion with selves from whom I have been estranged, whom I may have forgotten—or never known—how to love. Providing sustenance for facing new and recurring challenges, this communion prepares me to greet my future selves and to offer hospitality to self-estranged others who come my way.

When I sew with a pattern, I'm disconcerted by the certainty and secrecy, all those stitches designed to lock things into place and hide how the garment is constructed. A "clean finish" conceals raw edges within a tidy hem. An anchoring stitch, back tack, backstitch, or pick-stitch secures a seam by reinforcing its final stitches. Meant to be invisible, a staystitch and an edge stitch stabilize fabric, while a slip stitch and a catch stitch join layers and edges to keep things where they belong. I love well-constructed garments, but I'm drawn to the underbelly: the reverse side of the fabric, the threads and seams hidden from view, the "whiskers"—tiny, frayed threads from raw seam edges. I like garments that lend themselves to reinterpretation, that aren't afraid to show what they're made of.

A pair of jeans mended with yellow thread, an ivory sweater dotted with patches of red and blue yarn, a white sock distended from the weight of its colorful mendings: when I discovered Celia Pym's work,

I immediately sent her an email because I couldn't wait to talk with a "visible mender." "I love seeing damage and holes," Pym explained as we chatted by phone. "The bit that's broken is usually the thing that has shaped us." In a threadbare patch at the knee or a hole where a toe has poked through, Pym sees "a record of daily living."[18]

In welcoming the toe that pokes through, visible mending suggests that mending is not about defense: preventing or cordoning off brokenness. Rather, it's about accepting contingency, embracing the certainty that slip stitches slip, seams unravel, anchoring stitches become unmoored. As American artist mg shapiro writes of her *Adhesive Bandages*—a series of works composed of adhesive bandages or surgical tape arranged in layers, orderly sequences, or disorderly piles—Band-Aids themselves show "discolorations, signs of aging, and hints of disintegration," reminding us of "underlying damage" and undermining final "hopes of mending."[19] And as Pym's visible mending highlights, mending always leaves traces of what has come before. Like a scar, it is ledger and manifest. A hieroglyphics of the past. Witness to below-surface wounding and our capacity for repair. A blossom emerging from blood-rich soil—the terrible beauty of a chokecherry tree engraved on an enslaved woman's back.[20]

mg shapiro, *proliferations*, sliced adhesive bandages on glass, 4 × 6 in., 2008. Used by permission of the artist.

I think my mending is finished, but then it happens: a loud rending or barely perceptible tear. So I summon my needle and thread, ready to incorporate traces of repair into the overall design: a slight irregularity of texture, a thread color that differs from the original, a faint fading where a hemline used to be, a crease that no amount of ironing can erase. Sometimes, loss blossoms into lace as tiny rays of light escape from the line of reconnected fibers, reminding me of the intricate beauty of designs wrought from accretions of mending. Inhabiting the non-pastness of the past, I embrace the work of repair knowing that the sleeve will tear again, a mitten may forever miss its mate, a frayed edge may never be made whole.

"There are really two environments governing the evolution of sentient creatures," writes Ferris Jabr, "an external one, which they inhabit, and an internal one, which they construct."[21] Mending sits at the intersection of these worlds. Making do with the pieces we've been given, we sentient creatures sort and salvage, supplement and discard, incorporating old and new selves as we intertwine with other menders, would-be menders, and a world in dire need of mending.

The work is never finished. Indeed, "living" is my name for the space between the stitches.

mg shapiro, *proliferations*, adhesive bandages on glass, 5 × 7 in., 2008. Used by permission of the artist.

Hem: Acknowledgments

I started gathering bits for *Mendings* during the summer of 2014, while writing what I thought would be a twelve-page introduction for a book about fiber artists. Lia Purpura responded to my twelve pages with immense care and enthusiasm, suggesting that they warranted a book of their own. That same summer, I joined a weekly "100 words" writing group with two wonderful mentors and writers: Tiya Miles and Martha Jones. I'm grateful for Martha's encouraging, insightful engagement with my early work, for Tiya's perfectly timed readings of my manuscript, and for inspiring, ongoing conversations with Tiya about texts and textiles. Scotti Parrish and Valerie Traub each gave me a much-needed nudge to pursue this project and supported my application to the University of Michigan's Institute for the Humanities. As a John Rich Fellow at the Institute, I benefited tremendously from Sidonie Smith's career-long commitment to the study and practice of life writing, and I was privileged to work with a talented, supportive cohort. Katie Lennard, Jean Hébrard, Lizzie Hutton, Marjorie Rubright, and Mireille Roddier deserve special thanks; their generous, generative engagements with my ideas and experiences helped me find a voice for *Mendings*.

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writing, and her wise feedback set me on a path for learning to write creative nonfiction. James Pinto read my fledgling, stilted writing with equal parts rigor and kindness, pointing me to related materials and helping me to view the project then, and in later iterations, as warranting sustained attention. Laura Kasischke offered to read my first essays before I knew they were essays, and her enthusiasm gave me the confidence to keep writing. Nick Harp, Rebecca Baron, Kyle Frisina, and Tricia Khleif each offered thoughtful responses to early drafts, as did Hayley O'Malley, Matthew Liberti, Aida Levy-Hussen, Van Jordan, Hadji Bakara, and audience members who engaged with my work during the C21 Roundtable sponsored by the English department at the University of Michigan. Anne Curzan, Anne Gere, and Mary Schleppegrell shared helpful feedback when none of us—myself included—fully understood what I was trying to do. With her artistry and creative vision, Tannaz Motevalli brought the pages of my manuscript to life. Denise Looker offered bighearted listening, reading, and friendship, and David Porter received my work with characteristic openness and curiosity, fueling my hope that we humans can learn a thing or two from loons. John Whittier-Ferguson read various drafts with a level of warmth and compassion that I can only hope to emulate in responding to others' work. Scotti Parrish, Cathy Sanok, and Andrea Zemgulys sustained me with honest feedback, yummy baking, and friendship. At just the right time, Gaurav Desai gave me helpful publishing advice, and Bibiana Obler reminded me of the fundamental stakes of my argument. Mindy Misener's keen ear and encouragement helped me enliven and believe in my prose, and Ruby Tapia showed that she was *with* me in reading every line. Sarah Ensor, my Cosmic Cousin, gifted me with astonishingly perceptive, patient readings. Stephanie Moody—my former student, colleague, and dear friend—offered incisive feedback about *Mendings* throughout its long gestation. For three years, Ali Shapiro and I traded weekly "100 words," and our exchanges were the best writing apprenticeship I could have imagined. *Mendings* is a far better book thanks to the many times I've gathered with Stephanie and Ali to think, question, laugh, and figure out how to live as the world burns around us.

Among the many things I've loved about writing *Mendings*, learning from my students and former students has been one of my greatest joys. Graduate students Catherine Brist, Sora Brockman, Carlina Duan, Denise Dooley, Lisa Levin, Danielle Lillge, Baleja Saidi, Elizabeth Tacke, Kristen VanEyk, and Adelay Witherite have asked probing questions, offered wonderful macro- and micro-level suggestions, and inspired me with their own dazzling work. Bret Moore has spent countless hours responding and re-responding to swatches of my manuscript; I'm so grateful for Bret's brilliant feedback, our collaborative dialogue, and our shared sense that we've been ourselves for a very long time. Jennifer Buehler, Julia Hansen, and Becca Pickus have graced me with years of life-sustaining dialogue, wisdom, and care. It has been such a gift to learn from these amazing teachers.

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As the impoilit pig girl might have written ca. 1972, I'm so Very! Very? *very* (that means something) grateful (I really mean it) to the many, many people who helped bring *Mendings* into the world. I give you a smuche on the page.

Notes

PIECING. A PROLOGUE

1 Didion, "On Keeping a Notebook," 133.

2 Stallybrass, "Worn Worlds," 69.

SELVEDGE ▮

An earlier version of "Selvedge" appeared in a much different form in *Entropy Magazine* (September 2018).

1 "Selvedge." *Merriam-Webster.com*, accessed April 22, 2014, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/selvage.

2 Paul Simon's "Mrs Robinson" is part of the soundtrack for the 1967 film *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, dir.).

3 M. Friedman, "Experiencing a Knitting Disaster?"

4 Warwick and Cavallaro, *Fashioning the Frame*, 116.

5 Butler, "Joy of Flying," 11.

6 Katchadourian, *Mended Spiderweb* series.

7 Warwick and Cavallaro, *Fashioning the Frame*, 119, 206.

8 Kober, "Two Sisters Married," 18.

9 In the spirit of mending, I want to note that my foster brother—whom I last saw almost fifty years ago—was a child who had sustained severe abuse and neglect prior to entering the foster care system. He was a hurt child who hurt another child in an effort to satisfy his many emotional and psychological needs. Our intertwined stories illustrate the ripple effects of both harm and mending: how harm can engender harm and how everyone involved in circles of harm shares a need for mending.

10 Sarah Ensor alerted me to the history of the ginkgo tree, which appears in fossils from 270 million years ago. Thanks to their resistance to disease

and insects and their ability to form aerial roots and sprouts, ginkgo trees can live as long as three thousand years. In Hiroshima, Japan, six ginkgo trees located less than two kilometers from the 1945 atom bomb explosion survived and still thrive today.

11 Morrison, *Sula*, 121. Morrison writes of her protagonist Sula, "Like any artist with no art form, she became dangerous." Sula's "idle imagination" leaves her restless and "craving," hungry for something to "engage her tremendous curiosity."

12 Danticat, *Art of Death*, 149.

13 Bass, "Orange-and-White High-Heeled Shoes," 58.

14 Melago, "Knitters with Hopelessly Knotted Yarn."

SALVAGE 2

An earlier version of "Salvage" appeared in a different form in *Bennington Review* (Fall 2018).

1 Warwick and Cavallaro, *Fashioning the Frame*, 170.

2 Elana Herzog, interview with the author, Brooklyn, NY, March 24, 2016.

3 Harper, "Introduction."

4 Yeats, "Lake Isle of Innisfree."

REDRESS 3

An earlier version of "Redress" appeared in a much different form in *The Normal School* (February 2020).

1 "Dress." *Merriam-Webster.com*, accessed October 20, 2018, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dress.

2 Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 359.

3 "Ostentation." *Merriam-Webster.com*, accessed October 4, 2018, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ostentation.

4 A lek is a group of male peacocks gathered to engage in competitive displays and courtship rituals designed to persuade peahens to mate with them.

5 Students in my course write a personal narrative about their relationship to clothing, create small group podcasts about clothing-related issues, and, once per term, share and discuss a clothing-related story from the news. They also read a broad range of materials organized into three units: "Worn Stories," "Sartorial Discipline and Resistance," and "Clothing Ecologies."

6 Ross Gay, *Book of Delights*, 231, 232.

7 Wang, *Collected Schizophrenias*, 55, 56.

8 Wang, *Collected Schizophrenias*, 45, 54.

9 Wang, *Collected Schizophrenias*, 56.

10 "Redress." *Merriam- Webster.com*, accessed October 20, 2018, https://www.merriam- webster.com/dictionary/redress.

11 Ross Gay, *Book of Delights*, 92, 93.

12 Ross Gay, *Book of Delights*, 1.

13 Borich, "Of Wearing My Red Dress," 120, 122, 123, 127.

14 Borich, "Of Wearing My Red Dress," 127.

15 An ouroboros—a serpent swallowing its tail—is an ancient Egyptian symbol of repetition, renewal, and the cyclical nature of time. See Bekhrad, "Ancient Symbol."

16 Quoted in Prum, *Evolution of Beauty*, 23.

17 Prum, *Evolution of Beauty*, 27.

18 Quoted in Jabr, "Beauty Is Making Scientists Rethink."

19 Quoted in Prum, *Evolution of Beauty*, 30.

20 Jabr, "Beauty Is Making Scientists Rethink."

21 B. Davis, "Little Brown Dress"; Milburn, *Slow Clothing*, 110; Rodabaugh, *Mending Matters*, 19.

22 For trenchant critiques of contemporary clothing production, see Pham, "High Cost of High Fashion"; and Bernstein, "That Vetements Window Display." Both Pham and Bernstein remind us that companies at all levels—from budget to luxury fashion—engage in overproduction. Centering this fact helps to avoid common pitfalls of anti-fast-fashion campaigns: 1) scapegoating budget fashion consumers and teenage girls as unethical for buying fast fashion, and 2) framing Black, Latina, and Asian women and girls as passive, powerless victims of sweatshop fashion who must be rescued by wealthy American and European shoppers. As Pham argues, "From the Triangle Shirtwaist Strike in New York City in 1909 (the largest work stoppage in the United States at the time) to the massive Chinese Ladies Garment Workers strike in San Francisco's Chinatown in 1938 (which lasted fifteen weeks) to more recent actions by workers in and from the Philippines, Cambodia, India, Bangladesh, and Indonesia, garment employees have long resisted oppressive conditions." Consumer choices matter, but meaningful consumer activism must address the explicit demands of garment workers. "What if," Bernstein asks, "fashion brands started cultivating new relationships between garment workers and consumers?"

23 For critiques of virtuous consumption—the assuaging belief that buying handmade, responsibly sourced, or fair-trade clothing prevents one from contributing to the overall crisis—see Pham, "High Cost of High Fashion"; Bernstein, "That Vetements Window Display"; and Saha, *Empire of Touch*.

24 Gordon, *Textiles*, 197.

25 See Robertson, "Afterlife of Clothing."

26 Thomas, *Fashionopolis*, 7.

27 Chemicals and pollution: Fletcher, *Craft of Use*, 21; landfills: Thomas, *Fashionopolis*, 210.

28 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, 33.

THREADS 4

1 V. Friedman, "This Is Not the End."

2 Lauren Naimola, interview with the author, Ann Arbor, MI, October 20, 2015.

3 Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 9; Hatcher, "Twenty-One Dresses."

4 Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 207.

5 Brown, *Material Unconscious*, 4.

6 De Waal, *Hare with Amber Eyes*, 17, 16.

7 De Waal, *Hare with Amber Eyes*, 17. "There is no easy story in legacy," writes de Waal. "What is remembered and what is forgotten? There can be a chain of forgetting, the rubbing away of previous ownership as much as the slow accretion of stories."

8 See, for instance, Poll, "Preserving Brutal Histories." Textile conservationist Julia Brennan conserves clothing left behind after mass atrocities. She has salvaged thousands of garments from a Khmer Rouge prison in Cambodia and a huge container of bloodstained clothing collected from victims of the Rwandan genocide. In Rwanda, Brennan preserved a dress pierced with holes formed by grenade shrapnel and a T-shirt sliced by a machete.

9 Ashley's sack was temporarily exhibited at the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC, but since 2022, it has been housed at the International African American Museum in Charleston, SC.

10 Miles, *All That She Carried*, 5.

11 Miles, *All That She Carried*, xiv, xv, 131.

12 Valerie Steele, quoted in V. Friedman, "Should These Clothes Be Saved?" According to Steele, director and chief curator of the Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology, "Old clothes, in general, are so tied to the body, and female bodies in particular, that they have not been valorized as objects, like paintings, which were seen as examples of male genius." Quoted in V. Friedman, "Should These Clothes Be Saved?"

13 Quoted in Stallybrass, "Worn Worlds," 75.

14 Stallybrass, "Worn Worlds," 75.

15 Stallybrass, "Worn Worlds," 76. Drawing on Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives*, Stallybrass highlights the "political reality and psychological validity" of the desire for clothing; clothes can be "stepping-stones upon which one walks away from an unbearable present." In *All That She Carried*, Miles similarly underscores "the immeasurable value of material culture to the histories of the marginalized" and the crucial roles that material objects such as clothing played "in defending enslaved people's dignity as humans and as women." Cherished things could be companions, soften daily routine, reinforce a sense of self-worth, link kin, and reaffirm relational ties. For instance, drawing on Elizabeth Keckley's *Behind the Scenes: Or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House*, Miles notes that Keckley wrote a letter to her mother asking her to send "a pretty frock"; given that Keckley was enduring sexual violence by her master, Miles argues that she was "surely seeking a different, deeper kind of cover when she asked her mother for a dress." See Miles, *All That She Carried*, 4, 127, 130, 156.

16 Stallybrass, "Worn Worlds," 70.

17 For a firsthand account of her experiences as a dressmaker for First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln, see Keckley, *Behind the Scenes*.

18 Quoted in Miles, *All That She Carried*, 133–34. As Monica Miller explains, young Black boys dressed in the finest clothes were retained as house servants by elite white men. Paintings of white families often depict young Black boys alongside dogs and birds, suggesting that elite white men felt more powerful by displaying Black boys as household pets. Miller, "Luxury Slaves."

19 Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 78; Miles, *All That She Carried*, 146. Miles argues that for unfree women, "sexual ties that enabled better material conditions came at great physical and emotional cost" (136).

20 Picquet, *Louisa Picquet, the Octoroon*, 13. See also Miles, *All That She Carried*, 154–55.

21 Miles, *All That She Carried*, 159–60.

22 Rooks, *Ladies' Pages*, 47. Rooks explores how early twentieth-century African American women used clothing as a tool for countering negative assumptions about their character.

23 Miles, *All That She Carried*, 157–59.

24 See Shaw, "Slave Cloth and Clothing Slaves," 7; Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 85; and Miles, *All That She Carried*, 160. Shaw emphasizes the "hidden world of enslaved artisans," and Camp highlights how enslaved women "claimed the product of their labor" by using "for their own purposes" the cotton that they were forced to cultivate and harvest. As Miles puts it, "Black women's sartorial rebellion ripped through the cloth cages imposed by their owners."

25 Square, "Enslaved People Helped Shape Fashion."

26 For more information about enslaved women's clothing practices, see Camp, *Closer to Freedom*.

27 "Sartorial rebellion": Miles, *All That She Carried*, 160; Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 83; Miles, *All That She Carried*, 152; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 226.

28 Precarity: Tsing, *Mushroom at the End*, 20.

29 Brooks, *Maud Martha*, 179.

30 Sweeney, *Reading Is My Window*, 234.

31 Sweeney, *Reading Is My Window*, 130, 234.

32 A. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, 45.

33 Fenyvesi, "Reading Prisoner Uniforms." According to Fenyvesi, the long-standing aversion to stripes is probably due to a faulty translation of a passage in the Old Testament: Leviticus 19:19. When this passage was translated from Greek to Latin, its prohibition of mixing two different kinds of things, such as linen and wool, was mistranslated as a prohibition of mixing two different colors. In the thirteenth century, Pope Boniface VIII forbade clergy from wearing stripes; at the same time, the laws of Saxony required prostitutes, serfs, and criminals to wear striped clothing.

34 The convict lease system assumed various forms in the South, but in its purest form, a corporation paid a fixed sum to the state for the labor of its convicts and assumed full responsibility for the convicts' care; in exchange, the corporation reaped the profit from convicts' labor. See Mancini, *One Dies*, 14–15. Because many Southern prisons were destroyed during the Civil War, incarcerated men and women in the post–Civil War South were often sent directly to coal mines, cotton and sugar plantations, turpentine farms, brickyards, sawmills, phosphate beds, and railroad construction sites. Black women also served as domestics and prostitutes at local road camps and jails, dug the campus of Georgia State College, manufactured shoes in South Carolina and prison garments in Alabama, and did farming, canning, laundry, and sewing on state-owned prison plantations. See Oshinsky, "*Worse Than Slavery*," 170, 172; Franklin, "Introduction," 5; Mancini, *One Dies*, 208; and Rafter, *Partial Justice*, 97.

35 "'Slaves of Turpentine'"; LeFlouria, *Chained in Silence*, 80.

36 LeFlouria, *Chained in Silence*, 90.

37 Burning: LeFlouria, *Chained in Silence*, 14; modeling: Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, 228.

38 Pishko, "What Inmates Really Wear."

39 "United Nations Standard Minimum Rules," 7.

40 Incarceration rates: Nellis, "Color of Justice." Accurate information about prison uniforms is difficult to obtain, but these states include Arizona, Indiana, Florida, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio, and Texas.

41 Pishko, "What Inmates Really Wear."

42 Billeaud, "Arizona Sheriff."

43 Tofig, "Prisons Using Colors to Classify Inmates."

44 Biggs, "'They Pink Dress,'" 64, 63. According to Biggs, the majority of incarcerated women in the United States have "survived at least one traumatic instance of interpersonal violence prior to their incarceration, most often in childhood." These incarcerated people's clothing practices recall those of Mattie Crawford, a woman employed as a blacksmith in Georgia's convict lease system. After her overseer "forced her to put on trousers" through repeated flogging and whipping, Crawford eventually embraced male garb, perhaps "to redirect the glare of her captors and to refashion the way in which her body was regarded by her keepers and the system at large"; see LeFlouria, *Chained in Silence*, 85, 160.

45 Girshick, "Out of Compliance," 197, 196. The two prisons are Central California Women's Facility and Valley State Prison for Women.

46 Woloshin, *Worn*.

47 "Men's Chain Gang Prisoner Costume," Walmart.com, accessed January 13, 2019, https://www.walmart.com/ip/Men-s-Chain-Gang-Prisoner-Costume/107591069.

48 I can't imagine a better illustration of Toni Morrison's concept of "playing in the dark." When white writers temporarily adopt an identity as a Black character, Morrison argues, they can revel in cultural characteristics that have historically been mapped onto Blackness and then firmly renounce those characteristics as "not me," thereby reinforcing their white identity and conception of whiteness. See Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, 52.

49 Rainey, "Objects That Matter."

50 U.S. News, "Geraldo Rivera Blames Hoodie."

51 Roxane Gay, "Place Where We Are Everything."

52 Kinney, *Hood*, 109.

53 Kinney, *Hood*, 100.

54 Kinney, *Hood*, 14–15, 17.

55 "Hoodwink." *Merriam-Webster.com*, accessed July 9, 2021, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hoodwink.

56 Rosin and Spiegel, "Hoodie."

57 This group later renamed itself Decolonize Our Museums.

58 Frank, "Museum's 'Kimono Wednesdays' Cancelled"; Khvan, "MFA to Host Forum."

59 Boucher, "Asian Americans Defend Boston MFA."

60 Rodney, "Confused Thinking."

61 Khvan, "MFA to Host Forum"; Cook, "MFA Director on Kimono Controversy."

62 Patel, *Migritude*, 5, 6, 7.

63 Patel, *Migritude*, 62.

64 Patel, *Migritude*, 95.

65 Patel, *Migritude*, 63, 62.

66 Japanese celebrate: McFeeters, "Counter-Protesters Join Kimono Fray"; prohibited garments: Mikuni, "'CAMP.'" Residents in internment camps were permitted to mail-order clothing and fabric through catalogs from Sears and Roebuck, Spiegel, and Montgomery Ward.

67 I'm grateful to Bret Moore and Lisa Levin for dialogue about this section.

68 Pham, "High Cost of High Fashion"; V. Friedman, "Fashion's Year in Cultural Don'ts."

69 Robertson, "Afterlife of Clothing," 30; Thomas, *Fashionopolis*, 150; Sekules, MEND!, 9; Thomas, *Fashionopolis*, 3, 8.

70 Thomas, *Fashionopolis*, 210; V. Friedman, "Hello, Little Microbe"; Tor, "10 Sustainable Textile Startups."

71 "Biofabrication": V. Friedman, "Hello, Little Microbe"; Thomas, *Fashionopolis*, 197.

72 Rodabaugh, *Mending Matters*, 79.

73 Fletcher, *Craft of Use*, 270, 272, 140, 243.

74 Twenty-five percent of a garment's footprint comes from how we care for it. See Milburn, *Slow Clothing*, 111.

75 See, for instance, Cardon, *Visible Mending*; Rodabaugh, *Mending Matters*.

76 Companies such as Patagonia, Eileen Fisher, A.P.C., TOAST, and ace&jig have programs for mending, repurposing, or swapping used clothes.

77 Artist Shinique Smith uses recycled clothing to construct sculptures, paintings, and site-specific installations. See Little, "Shinique Smith Adds New Layers."

78 Kurutz, "Now Is When."

79 Ensor, "Spinster Ecology," 428.

80 Ensor, "Spinster Ecology," 429.

81 Donna Haraway critiques the notion, evident in some kinds of futurisms, that things matter only if they work. See Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 3.

82 Ensor, "Spinster Ecology," 410. According to Ensor, the phrase *as if* "inscribes a sense of possibility into the present, even though—or perhaps precisely because—it is a possibility divorced from any potential for fruition" (424).

83 Thanks to Sarah Ensor for dialogue about this point. For further discussion of scalability, see Tsing, *Mushroom at the End*, 37–43. Contrasting unscalable matsutake mushroom cultivation with the scalable nature of sugarcane plantations that fostered slavery, Tsing questions the presumed value of scalability, highlighting "the messes" it can make (38).

84 Saha, *Empire of Touch*, 236.

85 Morrison, *Jazz*, 220. "I was sure one would kill the other," the "talking book" narrator says of the central characters in *Jazz*. "I waited for it so I could describe it. I was so sure it would happen. That the past was an abused record with no choice but to repeat itself at the crack and no power on earth could lift the arm that held the needle. I was so sure, and they danced and walked all over me. Busy, they were, busy being original, complicated, changeable—human, I guess you'd say, while I was the predictable one."

86 Bryan Stevenson, quoted in "Blueprint for How to Change the World."

87 Morrison, *Beloved*, 272.

88 Morrison, *Beloved*, 46, 105, 287.

89 Morrison, *Beloved*, 287–88.

90 "Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will" is often attributed to Antonio Gramsci, an Italian philosopher, journalist, and Marxist organizer who spent eleven years in prison for resisting Benito Mussolini's fascist regime. Gramsci actually borrowed the maxim from French writer Romain Rolland, but he repeatedly draws on the idea in his *Prison Notebooks*, written during his incarceration from 1926 to 1937. Ratcliffe, *Oxford Essential Quotations*. "I'm a pessimist because of intelligence, but an optimist because of will," Gramsci explained in 1929. "Whatever the situation, I imagine the worst that could happen in order to summon up all my reserves and will power to overcome every obstacle." Gramsci, *Letters from Prison*, 158–59.

MENDING 5

1 Saha, *Empire of Touch*, 224. See, for example, Parker, *Subversive Stitch*; Bryan-Wilson, *Fray*; McFadden, *Radical Lace and Subversive Knitting*; Ulrich, *Age of Homespun*; Miles, *All That She Carried*; and Weymar, Tiny Pricks Project. The Tiny Pricks Project website describes its mission in these terms: "Contributors from around the world are stitching Donald Trump's words into textiles, creating the material record of his presidency and of the movement against it. . . . The collection counterbalances the impermanence of Twitter and other social media, and Trump's statements as president through the use of textiles that embody warmth, craft, permanence, civility, and a shared history."

2 British Ministry of Information, *Make-Do and Mend*, 1, 19.

3 I'm grateful to Stephanie Moody and Ali Shapiro for dialogue about fixing.

4 "Approximate." *Lexico*, accessed July 9, 2021, https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/approximate. "Approximate." *Merriam-Webster.com*, accessed July 9, 2021, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/approximate.

5 See DeSilvey, *Curated Decay*, 166. DeSilvey writes that in their work on ecologies of abandonment in Detroit, Joan Iverson Nassauer and Julie Raskin discuss the social and psychological benefits generated by small acts of ordering and maintenance in otherwise derelict landscapes.

6 DeSilvey, *Curated Decay*, 161, 175, 169, 183.

7 The warp is the foundation threads that run the length of the loom, while the weft is the horizontal threads that interlace through the warp to create a woven fabric.

8 Cnaani, "Sleeves."

9 Becker, "Woven Portraits."

10 Saha, *Empire of Touch*, 225, 223, 224.

11 Quoted in Johnston, "Meet Celia Pym."

12 Celia Pym, telephone interview with the author, July 8, 2015.

13 Patel, *Migritude*, 36, 32, 35, 38.

14 Morrison, *Sula*, 121.

15 Quoted in Johnston, "Meet Celia Pym."

16 Manaugh, "Infinite Exchange."

17 Walcott, "Love after Love."

18 Pym, interview.

19 shapiro, "Artist Statement." mg shapiro made her first Band-Aid pieces shortly after her son was born with an almost fatal congenital heart defect. Collecting construction materials from around the house—"screws and nails, bits of string, safety and straight pins, glues and tape"—she cut a heart out of poor-quality cardboard, ripped it apart, and then set about "repairing" it, creating "a precariously held together heart." See mg shapiro, interview with the author, New York City, July 10, 2016.

20 Morrison, *Beloved*, 18.

21 Jabr, "How Beauty Is Making Scientists Rethink Evolution."

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Memoir/ Women's studies/Fashion and textile studies

Mendings tells an intimate story about family, selfhood, and the love and loss lodged in garments. In this narrative about making meaning of brokenness and grief, Megan Sweeney reflects on her childhood entanglement with her mother, her loss-filled relationship with her alcoholic father, and her attachment to the clothes that have mended her as she has mended them. Sweeney explores how clothing fosters communication and enables us to cultivate relationships with ourselves and with others, both living and deceased. In dialogue with other clothing lovers, writers, fiber artists, evolutionary biologists, historians, and environmentalists, Sweeney also foregrounds the entwinement of clothing, race, and gender as she considers the ethics and environmental effects of clothing consumption, the history of clothing in the US prison system, and the roles that textiles play as sources of creativity, artistry, and self-fashioning, even within conditions of constraint. For Sweeney, the act of mending is a way of living. Unlike fixing, which leaves no trace of damage or loss, mending allows Sweeney to embrace holes, rips, and threadbare patches as part of her life's design.

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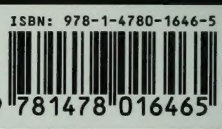

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